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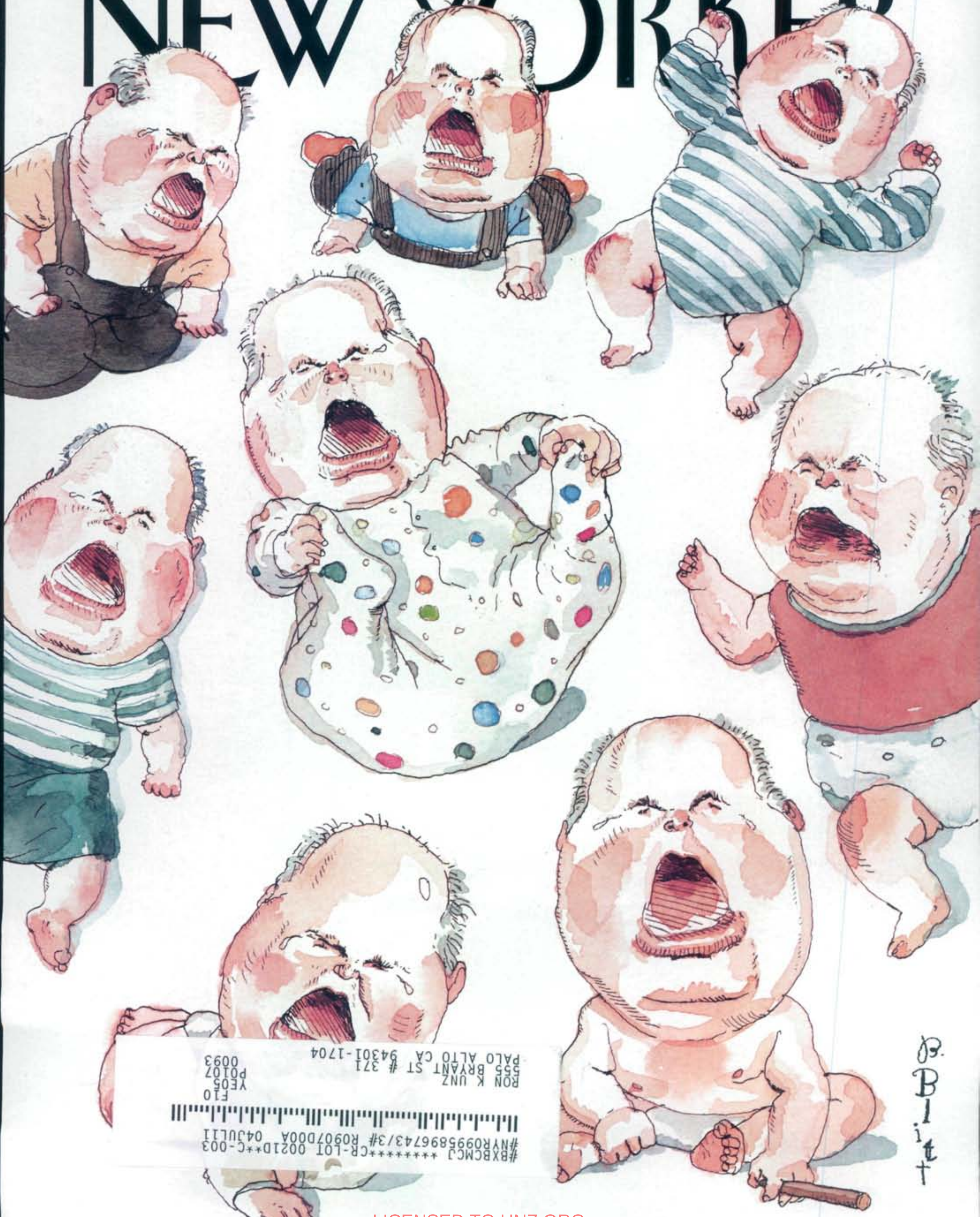

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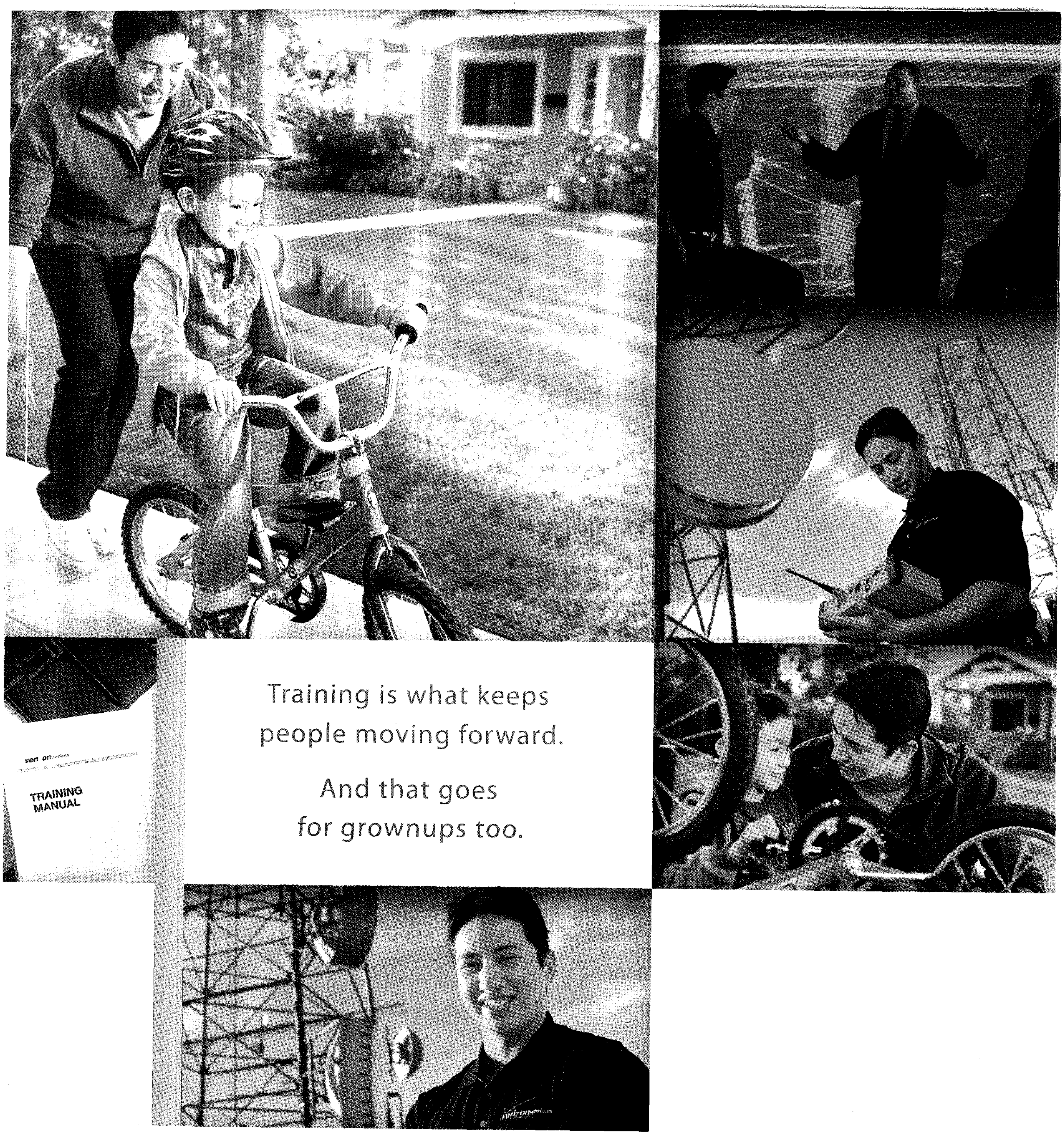

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CONTRIBUTORS

Jeffrey Toobin ("The Replacement," p. 34) won the 2008 J. Anthony Lukas Book Prize for "The Nine: Inside the Secret World of the Supreme Court," which is available in paperback.

Hendrik Hertzberg (Comment, p. 23), the author of "Politics: Observations & Arguments," writes frequently about politics and policy. He also writes a blog on newyorker.com.

Dana Goodyear (The Talk of the Town, p. 25) is a staff writer. Her book of poems, "Honey and Junk," is out in paperback.

Ron Chernow ("Madoff and His Models," p. 28), a former president of the PEN American Center, is the author of "Titan: The Life of John D. Rockefeller, Sr." and "Alexander Hamilton."

Keith Gessen ("The Accused," p. 42) is a founding editor of the magazine *n+1*. His novel, "All the Sad Young Literary Men," comes out in paperback this month.

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Dan Chiasson (Books, p. 70), a poet and literary critic, teaches at Wellesley College. His books include "Natural History" and "One Kind of Everything: Poem and Person in Contemporary America."

Paul Goldberger (The Sky Line, p. 76) writes about architecture for the magazine. He has a new book, "Why Architecture Matters," coming out later this year.

John Lahr (The Theatre, p. 78), the magazine's senior drama critic, is working on a book about Tennessee Williams.

Terese Svoboda (Poem, p. 38) will publish her fifth collection of poems, "Weapons Grade," this fall.

Barry Blitt (Cover) created the illustrations for a new children's book, "What's the Weather Inside?," which was published earlier this month.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM
Audio: The Political Scene, a weekly conversation hosted by *Dorothy Wickenden.* / *Keith Gessen* talks about the Politkovskaya trial, and takes questions from readers. / Video: *John Lahr* interviews the director Michael Blakemore. / Blogs: *Steve Coll* makes his way through the stimulus bill, *Amy Davidson* digs into the day's news, the Cartoon Lounge reports from SXSW, plus the Book Bench, the Front Row, and posts by *Hendrik Hertzberg, George Packer, Evan Osnos,* and *Sasha Frere-Jones.* / A complete archive of every issue, back to 1925. / Animated cartoons and the caption contest.

THE MAIL

IT'S A MAN'S WORLD

I am a radical lesbian and a separatist witch—a more frightening spectre the patriarchy has not seen—and I am here to tell you that there is nothing to laugh about in the ongoing war against women ("Lesbian Nation," by Ariel Levy, March 2nd). If you are a non-believer, just tune in one night to prime-time television—streaming up close and in full color into uncountable American homes—and you will see that the onslaught is ongoing, with no sign of letting up. Where is a story—just one—of the agonizing and deeply radical passions we experience and express in our struggles of heart, mind, and soul to "dismantle the Master's house," as our own poet laureate Audre Lorde has so eloquently put it? Clearly, such a story will never be palatable to the mainstream press—the "Master's tools"—out, visible lesbians in pop culture notwithstanding.

Annie Long
Asheville, N.C.

SPOILER ALERT

I'm sure by now that *The New Yorker* has received at least some complaints about Anthony Lane's review of the film "Watchmen" (The Current Cinema, March 9th). I, for one, was glad to see that he clearly spelled out the end of the film and the resolution of the central mystery in the first half of his review. I can speak only for myself, but I hate having to sit through an entire movie wondering, "What's going to happen to that guy?" or "Who's the bad guy?" or (most annoyingly) "How is this going to end?" Luckily, thanks to Lane, I won't have to worry about any of those inconveniences. Now I just wish he had been around before I sat through all of "Citizen Kane," when I could have just read a review called "It Was His Sled."

Jordan Taylor
Lewisville, Texas

A MEMBER OF THE BAR

Although my mother, Faith, was not at the reunion party at McSorley's, she was the "Seidenberg" half of the 1970 case Seidenberg and DeCrow v. McSorley's Old Ale House, Inc., which ended the male-only policy at such establishments statewide (The Talk of the Town, by Lauren Collins, March 9th). Through the years, my mother was confounded that of the many landmark lawsuits she argued—for Title IX (Cook v. Colgate University) or military law (U.S. v. Newak)—people remarked most frequently about the liberating of what is, by many accounts, a fairly seedy watering hole. It was all the more surprising considering that she rarely consumes more than a half glass of wine on any occasion. Now there often seems to be as many or more female patrons as there are male, and usually all of them are wearing pants, something that was also once viewed with alarm.

Lisa Seidenberg
Westport, Conn.

JUST CHECKING

John McPhee himself taught me a lesson about the importance of accuracy and the persistent authority of error ("Checkpoints," February 9th & 16th). In 1988, I published an article in *Western American Literature* about McPhee's book on Alaska, "Coming Into the Country." Because we are both Princeton graduates, I sent him a copy, hoping that he would not be appalled by my scholarly jargon. He promptly replied with a warm, diplomatic handwritten note, in which he delicately pointed out that, in the midst of one of my major interpretive maneuvers, I had made a significant mistake. He even drew me a picture. That article was assigned to students and cited in scholarly books. To the best of my knowledge, no one except McPhee ever caught the error.

Philip G. Terrie
Port Huron, Mich.

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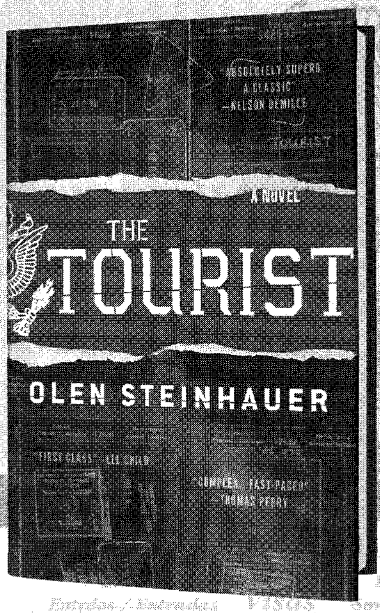

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Leela James at Carnegie Hall's "Honor!" Photograph by Yola Monakhov.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
22	23	24	18	19	20	21

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
SO BAD IT'S GOOD

Lloyd Kaufman's cult film from 1985, "The Toxic Avenger," about a New Jersey janitor who becomes a mutant superhero after falling into a tub of radioactive glop, comes to the stage. John Rando directs a musical based on the film, with a book and lyrics by Joe DiPietro ("I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change") and music and lyrics by David Bryan, Bon Jovi's keyboardist, at New World Stages. (See page 9.)

NIGHT LIFE
EL MAESTRO

The Latin-music legend Johnny Pacheco, who put salsa on the map with the creation of Fania Records, in 1964, celebrates his seventy-fourth birthday at Town Hall, with the help of Andy Montañez, Miriam Colón, Miguel Algarín, and many others. (See page 11.)

ART
LATE SHOW

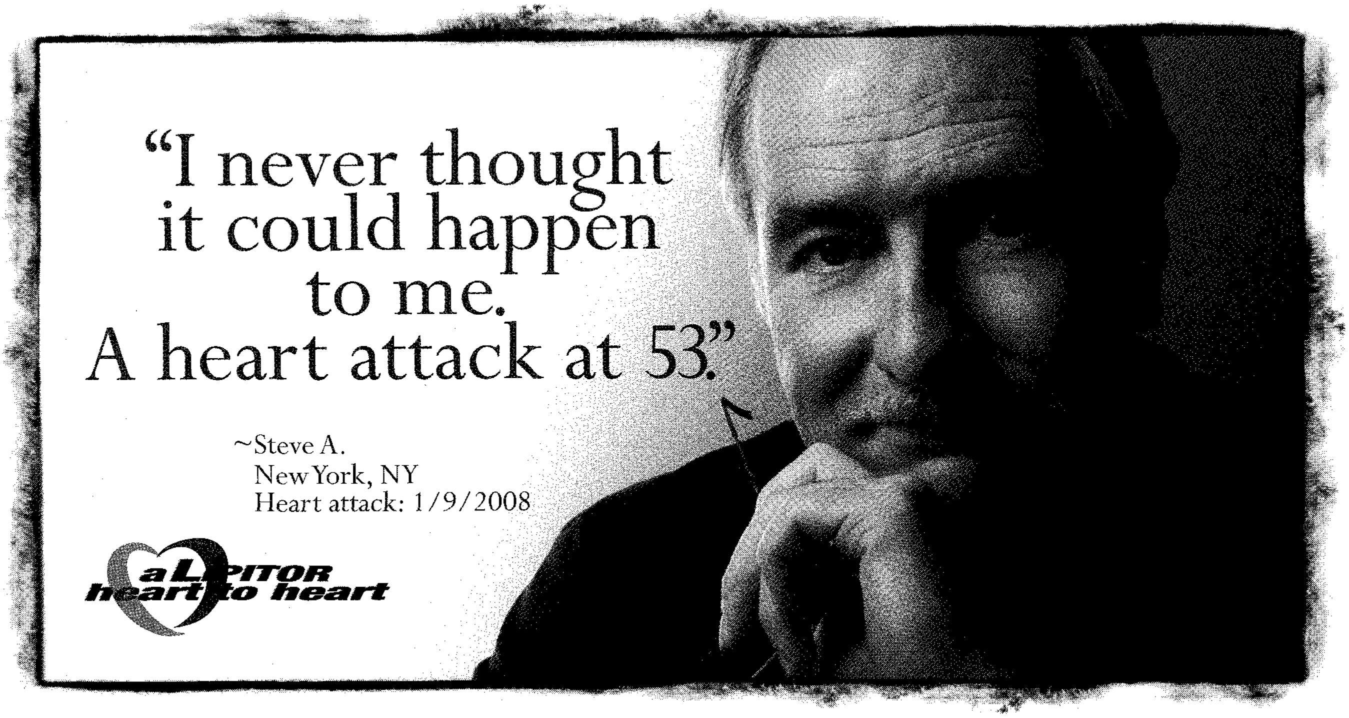
The self-taught Richard Allen Morris, whose champions include John Baldessari, began making art while stationed on an aircraft carrier during the Korean War; he's been working under the radar in San Diego ever since. The artist's eclectic oeuvre—Pop-expressionist portraits, impasto-thick abstractions, sculptures of guns made from studio scraps—is the subject of "Morris Code," at the Peter Blum gallery, in Chelsea. (See page 12.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
DEEP RIVER

Michael Tippett's moving 1944 oratorio, "A Child of Our Time," uses spirituals to frame the story of the incident that led to Kristallnacht. It is performed this week as part of Carnegie Hall's "Honor!" festival, which is curated by Jessye Norman. (See page 14.)

READINGS AND TALKS
PAINTING BY NUMBERS

Joseph Rivera, a former New York City police officer and the author of "Vandal Squad," a book about efforts to thwart graffiti on the subway system from 1984 to 2004, talks about the old days with some of his former colleagues and a few of the taggers they spent their time chasing. (See page 20.)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New York, NY
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LIPITOR is not for everyone. It is not for those with liver problems. And it is not for women who are nursing, pregnant or may become pregnant. If you take LIPITOR, tell your doctor if you feel any new muscle pain or weakness. This could be a sign of rare but serious muscle side effects. Tell your doctor about all medications you take. This may help avoid serious drug interactions. Your doctor should do blood tests to check your liver function before and during treatment and may adjust your dose. The most common side effects are gas, constipation, stomach pain and heartburn. They tend to be mild and often go away.

LIPITOR is one of many cholesterol-lowering treatment options that you and your doctor can consider.

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IMPORTANT FACTS

LIPITOR® atorvastatin calcium tablets (LIP-ih-tore)

LOWERING YOUR HIGH CHOLESTEROL

High cholesterol is more than just a number, it's a risk factor that should not be ignored. If your doctor said you have high cholesterol, you may be at an increased risk for heart attack. But the good news is, you can take steps to lower your cholesterol.

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WHO IS LIPITOR FOR?

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- People who cannot lower their cholesterol enough with diet and exercise
- Adults and children over 10

Who should NOT take LIPITOR:

- Women who are pregnant, may be pregnant, or may become pregnant. LIPITOR may harm your unborn baby. If you become pregnant, stop LIPITOR and call your doctor right away.
- Women who are breast-feeding. LIPITOR can pass into your breast milk and may harm your baby.
- People with liver problems
- People allergic to anything in LIPITOR

BEFORE YOU START LIPITOR

Tell your doctor:

- About all medications you take, including prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, vitamins, and herbal supplements
- If you have muscle aches or weakness
- If you drink more than 2 alcoholic drinks a day
- If you have diabetes or kidney problems
- If you have a thyroid problem

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LIPITOR is a prescription medicine. Along with diet and exercise, it lowers "bad" cholesterol in your blood. It can also raise "good" cholesterol (HDL-C).

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POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF LIPITOR

Serious side effects in a small number of people:

- **Muscle problems** that can lead to kidney problems, including kidney failure. Your chance for muscle problems is higher if you take certain other medicines with LIPITOR.
- **Liver problems.** Your doctor may do blood tests to check your liver before you start LIPITOR and while you are taking it.

Symptoms of muscle or liver problems include:

- Unexplained muscle weakness or pain, especially if you have a fever or feel very tired
- Nausea, vomiting, or stomach pain
- Brown or dark-colored urine
- Feeling more tired than usual
- Your skin and the whites of your eyes turn yellow

If you have these symptoms, call your doctor right away.

The most common side effects of LIPITOR are:

- Headache
- Diarrhea, gas
- Rash
- Constipation
- Upset stomach and stomach pain
- Muscle and joint pain

Side effects are usually mild and may go away by themselves. Fewer than 3 people out of 100 stopped taking LIPITOR because of side effects.

HOW TO TAKE LIPITOR

Do:

- Take LIPITOR as prescribed by your doctor.
- Try to eat heart-healthy foods while you take LIPITOR.
- Take LIPITOR at any time of day, with or without food.
- If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember. But if it has been more than 12 hours since your missed dose, wait. Take the next dose at your regular time.

Don't:

- Do not change or stop your dose before talking to your doctor.
- Do not start new medicines before talking to your doctor.
- Do not give your LIPITOR to other people. It may harm them even if your problems are the same.
- Do not break the tablet.

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THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

CHASING MANET
Primary Stages presents a new comedy by Tina Howe, about a painter from Boston and her friend, who plan to escape a nursing home via the QE2 to Paris. Jane Alexander stars; Michael Wilson directs. Previews begin March 24. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

EXIT THE KING
Geoffrey Rush (in his Broadway début), Susan Sarandon, Lauren Ambrose, and Andrea Martin star in the Eugène Ionesco comedy, about a king who refuses to relinquish control of his kingdom. Translated and directed by Neil Armfield. In previews. (Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

GOD OF CARNAGE
The latest play by Yasmina Reza ("Art"), which opened in London last year, directed by Matthew Warchus, about two sets of parents who convene to discuss the bad behavior of their children. James Gandolfini, Jeff Daniels, Hope Davis, and Marcia Gay Harden star. In previews. Opens March 22. (Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

GREEK HOLIDAY
At Abingdon, the New York première of a black comedy by Mayo Simon, directed by Stephen Hollis, about a couple who try to reconcile after the husband's infidelity. Opens March 18. (312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444.)

HAIR: THE AMERICAN TRIBAL LOVE-ROCK MUSICAL
The Shakespeare in the Park production moves to Broadway. Diane Paulus directs a cast of twenty-seven, including Gavin Creel and Will Swenson. In previews. (Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

HAMLET
Theatre for a New Audience presents Shakespeare's tragedy, starring Christian Camargo, Alvin Epstein, and Jennifer Ikeda. David Esbjornson directs. In previews. (The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010.)

HAPPINESS
A musical directed and choreographed by Susan Stroman, with a book by John Weidman, music by Scott Frankel, and lyrics by Michael Korie, about New Yorkers trapped on a subway train. In previews. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.)

IMPRESSIONISM
Jeremy Irons and Joan Allen star in this new play by Michael Jacobs, about the relationship between a photojournalist and a gallery owner. Jack O'Brien directs. In previews. Opens March 24. (Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

INKED BABY
The world première of a new play by Christina Anderson, about an infertile woman who asks her sister to carry a baby, while the world is plagued by an unnamed contamination. The cast includes LaChanze; Kate Whoriskey directs. In previews. Opens March 23. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

IRENA'S VOW
Tovah Feldshuh stars in a new play by Dan Gordon, about Irena Gut Opdyke, who worked as a housekeeper for a Nazi major and went on to shelter Jewish refugees. In previews. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

1984
Godlight Theatre Company presents Alan Lyddiard's adaptation of George Orwell's novel. In previews. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

AN ORESTEIA
Classic Stage Company presents a piece by Anne Carson, which gathers the works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides to tell the story of the House of Atreus. Part One is directed by Brian Kulick and Gisela Cardenas; Part Two is directed by Paul Lazar and choreographed by Annie-B Parson. Previews begin March 22. (136 E. 13th St. 212-352-3101.)

PEOPLE WITHOUT HISTORY
Richard Maxwell and the New York City Players present a sci-fi story about soldiers who encounter a woman who offers solace while they are taking a prisoner to jail. Opens March 19. (Performing Garage, 33 Wooster St. 212-479-0808.)

RAMBO SOLO
Nature Theatre of Oklahoma performs a piece inspired by the film "Rambo: First Blood," conceived and directed by Kelly Copper and Pavol Liska. Previews begin March 19. Opens March 21. (SoHo Rep, 46 Walker St. 212-352-3101.)

REASONS TO BE PRETTY
Neil LaBute's comic drama, in which a man's comments about a co-worker's pretty face get back to his girlfriend, moves to Broadway. Marin Ireland, Steven Pasquale, Piper Perabo, and Thomas Sadoski star; Terry Kinney directs. In previews. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

ROCK OF AGES
The eighties-era rock musical, written by Chris D'Arienzo, about an ambitious young rocker and a small-town girl who meet at a failing Hollywood rock club, moves to Broadway. Kristin Hanggi directs. In previews. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100.)

TARTUFFE
At the Pearl, Gus Kaikkonen directs the Molière comedy. In previews. (80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

THE TOXIC AVENGER
A new musical with a book and lyrics by Joe DiPietro ("I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change") and music and lyrics by David Bryan (of Bon Jovi), directed by John Rando ("Urinetown"), based on Lloyd Kaufman's 1985 film, about a New Jersey science student who is turned into a mutant superhero. In previews. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

WEST SIDE STORY
Arthur Laurents directs the 1957 Bernstein-Sondheim-Robbins musical, for which he wrote the libretto. Matt Cavanaugh and Josefina Scaglione star. In previews. Opens March 19. (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

WHY TORTURE IS WRONG, AND THE PEOPLE WHO LOVE THEM
The world première of an absurdist comedy by Christopher Durang, about a woman who fears that her husband is a terrorist and her parents work for the government. Laura Benanti stars; Nicholas Martin directs. Previews begin March 24. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

ZOOMAN AND THE SIGN
Signature Theatre Company presents this drama by Charles Fuller ("A Soldier's Play"), about one man who terrorizes a community and another man who tries to defend it. Stephen McKinley Henderson directs. In previews. Opens March 24. (555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7329.)

NOW PLAYING

BLITHE SPIRIT
Angela Lansbury, Jayne Atkinson, Christine Ebersole, Simon Jones, Deborah Rush, and Rupert Everett star in Noël Coward's comedy from 1945. Michael Blakemore directs. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

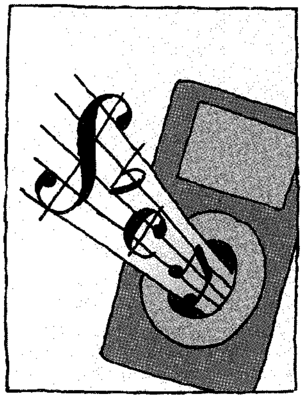
LA DIDONE
The U.S. première of the Wooster Group's production of Francesco Cavalli's opera, with a libretto by Francesco Busenello, which tells the story of Aeneas and Dido, with a sci-fi slant. Elizabeth LeCompte directs. (St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St. 718-254-8779.)

DISTRACTED
Is there an American actress that you root for more than Cynthia Nixon? She's not an actressy star but a committed one, and she wants to be as good as the material she's smart enough to choose. (She won a Tony for her 2006 performance in "Rabbit Hole.") So what's she doing in this banal mess, written by Lisa Loomer? Nixon plays Mama, one of those women in her late thirties that you see in New York, usually trailing behind an ill-mannered child. Pulled

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
PAY SCALE

The pop-music business has turned out to be the canary in the economic coal mine, a small example of the enormous financial buckling that is now global. The numbers are still dropping for musicians, but their responses to this problem have become more creative, sometimes to the point of desperation. If you buy a top-price ticket to one of No Doubt's upcoming shows (between $50 and $150, roughly), you will receive a free download of the band's entire catalogue. This makes sense, as touring is the one verifiably healthy part of the music business. Prince will release a new three-CD bundle on March 29, available exclusively at Target for $11.98. That may seem like a rollback to bargain prices of yesteryear (even though one of the CDs is by Prince's protégée Bria Valente), but it's more likely that Prince is seeing into the future—again. In 2004, he gave away a copy of his "Musicology" CD to everyone who attended one of his concerts, making concrete what is now almost axiomatic: recordings have become advertisements for shows.

—*Sasha Frere-Jones*



SEYMOUR CHWAST

in a zillion different directions by her career, her marriage to the surly Dad (Josh Stamberg), and the various distractions her shrieking, attention-challenged only son offers, Mama makes every effort to fulfill her roles, while philosophizing to the audience. This wouldn't be half bad if it didn't seem like Loomer's characters don't so much parent their children as justify their inability to manage them. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

FIRE THROWS

Rachel Dickstein's high-tech adaptation of "Antigone" splits its heroine in two: while one Antigone (Laura Butler) enacts the well-worn events of the tragedy, another (Erica Berg) stands out of time, reflecting on the action and revealing a tinge of regret beneath her iron will. This device provides some psychological coloring, but at heart it's still the same old story of autocracy and defiance locked in a shouting match. Dickstein's truer innovation is in the visual language she creates, a striking blend of movement and video projection that conveys a fragmented yet distinctly ancient world. It's an aesthetic that calls out for a more deconstructed "Antigone" than the grandiloquent text allows. (3LD Art & Technology Center, 80 Greenwich St. 212-352-3101.)

THE GOOD NEGRO

Tracey Scott Wilson wrote this play, about black leaders in the American civil-rights movement in the sixties. Liesl Tommy directs, at the Public. (425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

HEROES

Gérald Sibleyras's amiable comedy about three elderly veterans in a Paris retirement home has everything to recommend it—recent accolades in Paris and London, a translation by Tom Stoppard, a terrific cast—except bite. The veterans and their friendship are appealing: Gustave (the entertaining Ron Holgate) is a self-important crank; Henri (John Cullum) is up for anything, despite having a lame leg (Gustave derisively calls him "the enthusiast"); kindly, doddering Philippe (Jonathan Hogan) lets Gustave both read and answer his mail. After having bonded in their affection for one another and in their contempt for the nuns who run the place, the three friends, in varying states of sanity, concoct a quixotic scheme to escape to a distant poplar grove. It's a fine setup that Sibleyras doesn't fully dramatize, and this production, directed by Carl Forsman, isn't quite side-splitting enough to distract us from the script's shortcomings. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

HUMOR ABUSE

"I was born to be my father's straight man," Lorenzo Pisoni tells us in his endearing and gag-filled stage memoir about life as the son of a clown. Raised by Larry Pisoni, a.k.a. Lorenzo Pickle, the young Lorenzo made his circus début at age two and would later bloody his hands practicing juggling with fibreglass clubs. Initially, he wanted approval; along the way, he became a first-rate performer himself. (Last fall, he played a horse in the Broadway revival of "Equus.") The show, directed by Erica Schmidt (who co-wrote, with Pisoni), weaves confessional passages, accompanied by scrapbook photos, with reënactments of old routines, drawing a poignant contrast between the Zen-like confidence required of a clown and the quiet vulnerability of a boy with a distant dad. (City Center Stage II, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

INCIDENT AT VICHY

The Actors Company Theatre presents Arthur Miller's 1964 drama, about a group of men awaiting interrogation in Vichy, France, during the Second World War. Scott Alan Evans directs. (Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

OUR TOWN

David Cromer ("The Adding Machine") has managed to find irony and strangeness in Thornton Wilder's 1938 play, set in a theatre in a fictional New Hampshire town at the turn of the last century. In Cromer's minimalist production, the audience sits in bright light, and the Stage Manager (incredibly well played by Cromer himself) is our contemporary. We see how much of the hope of Mrs. Julia Gibbs (Lori Myers) and Mrs. Myrtle Webb (Kati Brazda) has been bound up in their children, the sweet George Gibbs (James McMenamin) and the plucky but whiny Emily Webb (Jennifer Grace), who fall in love and, in Act II, marry. By doing away with the usual effects, along with the self-important sentimentality that has marked so many productions of "Our Town," Cromer provides us with a master class in the fundamental art of making believe. No one is more brilliant at conveying the layers of a character than Myers. With her severity and resolve, her Mrs. Gibbs is ascetic, though not without humor. (Reviewed in our issue of 3/16/09.) (Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-868-4444.)

Raphael Saadiq, at the Fillmore New York at Irving Plaza.

ANNETTE MARNAT

33 VARIATIONS

Jane Fonda, Samantha Mathis, and Colin Hanks star in a new play written and directed by Moisés Kaufman. (Reviewed in this issue.) (O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.)

Also Playing

THE AMERICAN PLAN: Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. Through March 22. **ASTRONOME: A NIGHT AT THE OPERA:** Ontological-Hysteric, St. Marks Church, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-352-3101. **AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BILLY ELLIOT THE MUSICAL:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **CHICAGO:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **ENTER LAUGHING:** St. Peter's, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 212-935-5820. Through March 20. **GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS:** Minetta Lane, 18 Minetta Lane. 212-307-4100. **GUYS AND DOLLS:** Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 212-307-4100. **HEDDA GABLER:** American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. **IN THE HEIGHTS:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-307-4100. **JERSEY BOYS:** August Wilson, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. **KASPAR HAUSER:** Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101. **KRAPP, 39:** SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555. **THE LION KING:** Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 212-307-4747. **MAMMA MIA!:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-239-6200. **RUINED:** City Center Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. **SHREK THE MUSICAL:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. **SLEEPWALK WITH ME:** Bleecker Street Theatre, 45 Bleecker St. 212-239-6200. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. **THAT PRETTY PRETTY; OR, THE RAPE PLAY:** Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444. **THE 39 STEPS:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **WICKED:** Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-239-6200. **THE WIDOWING OF MRS. HOLROYD:** Mint, 311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

BEACON THEATRE

Broadway at 74th St. (800-745-3000)—March 19-21: The **Allman Brothers**, the Southern rockers from Macon, who, when they started out, in 1969, already seemed like a troop of battle-scarred veterans. Despite the periodic feuding, the splinter groups, and the devastating deaths, these grizzled midnight riders can still bring down the house. Through March 28.

BOWERY BALLROOM

6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—March 18: **Clem Snide**, named after a recurring character in William S. Burroughs's novels, celebrate the recent release of their album "Hungry Bird," which was completed three years ago but was caught in a dastardly limbo. The alt-country indie rockers still have their soothing melodies and candid wit. March 21: While **Morrissey** is still idolized by many as the wan, effete waif who fronted the Smiths in the eighties, the singer has filled out since then, and he's found solace in the present on his own terms. His signature pompadour has slightly thinned, but his voice and knack for wry self-parody remain intact. His latest solo album, "Years of Refusal," mines familiar ground.

FILLMORE NEW YORK AT IRVING PLAZA

17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—March 19-20: **Ozomatli**, the extra-large Latin-funk collective from L.A. March 21: **Raphael Saadiq** first hit it big twenty years ago with the new jack swing of Tony! Toni! Toné! before going on to a successful producing and solo career. He's a smooth performer who is well versed in the history of soul music. His latest album, "The Way I See It," has echoes of the Temptations, Booker T., and Bill Withers, but it is completely its own thing—so retro it's avant.

HIGHLINE BALLROOM

431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—March 23: The Danish singer-songwriter **Tina Dico**.

MADISON SQUARE GARDEN
Seventh Ave. at 33rd St. (212-307-7171)—March 19: **Fleetwood Mac**, which still has the original rhythm section of the drummer Mick Fleetwood and the bassist John McVie, was a straight-ahead British blues band when it started out, in the mid-sixties. It added some folk and psychedelic colors, picked up a couple of California free agents in the mid-seventies (the guitarist Lindsey Buckingham and the singer Stevie Nicks, who are also still with the band), and exploded on the pop scene. The group is currently on a hits-heavy tour, promoting the release of a new multimedia version of its 1977 album, "Rumours," which is practically a greatest-hits album all by itself.

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-570-3949)—March 20: **Mariachi los Camperos de Nati Cano** is a refined nine-piece mariachi band that, over nearly a half century, has brought the normally street-level folk music to the concert stage. Natividad Cano, the seventy-five-year-old bandleader and *vihuela* player, hails from a small town in Jalisco, the western-Mexican state most deeply entrenched in mariachi music. Cano eventually settled in Los Angeles in the late fifties and founded Los Camperos in 1961. Though the group uses the traditional mariachi instrumentation of violin, trumpet, harp, *vihuela*, guitar, and *guitarrón*, many of its sophisticated arrangements are written by the superb violinist Jesús (Chuy) Guzmán and they showcase a-cappella passages with tight harmonies. The group's polish never diminishes the heartrending power of the music. Take a classic such as José Alfredo Jiménez's "Camino de Guanajuato," which begins with the lines, "Life is worth nothing. It all starts out crying, and it ends the same way, crying." Performed live by Los Camperos, it is likely to leave you sobbing in agreement.

S.O.B.'S
204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (212-243-4940)—March 19: The saxophonist and bandleader **Maceo Parker** has a sterling funk résumé, having performed with James Brown and George Clinton.

TERMINAL 5
610 W. 56th St. (212-582-6600)—March 24: Britain's **Bloc Party** first appeared in 2005 with a slightly modernized amalgam of the angular post-punk sound of eighties bands like Gang of Four and Public Image Ltd. Bristling at the retro tag, the band stretched out on its sophomore release, expanding both its sound and its lyrical capabilities to shrug off the icy post-post-punk cliché. Bloc Party's latest effort, "Intimacy," carries on with the lyrical exploration (the album is essentially a rumination on faltering relationships), but revisits the hook-filled simplicity of its origins.

TOWN HALL
123 W. 43rd St. (212-840-2824)—March 20: A celebration of **Johnny Pacheco**'s seventy-fourth birthday. Pacheco was a Latin-music powerhouse years before he kicked off the salsa movement by forming, with Jerry Masucci, Fania Records, back in 1964. This bandleader knows how to get things moving. He'll be joined by the likes of **Miriam Colón, Andy Montañez,** and **Miguel Algarín.**

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—March 18: The legendary record producer and executive **George Avakian** celebrates his ninetieth birthday to the strains of traditional jazz from **David Ostwald's Gully Low Jazz Band.** March 18-21: A longtime New York mainstay, **George Coleman** is a veteran tenor-saxophone player who combines bebop expertise with a gritty edge that bespeaks his deep Memphis roots.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—March 19-22: The **Charles Tolliver Big Band,** which recently performed in the Thelonious Monk celebration concert at Town Hall, is primed for a featured engagement.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—The vibraphonist and composer **Teddy Charles,** a demi-legend from the fifties and sixties, appears with three different bands this week. March 19: His All Stars, with the pianist **Hank Jones,** explore the music of Charlie Parker. March 20-21: His Tenet delivers his signature compositions. March 22: He's a guest soloist with the saxophonist **Chris Byars**'s ensemble.

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—March 19 and March 21, in the Allen Room: **Kenny Barron,** the go-to man of mainstream jazz piano, leads a trio in celebration of the release of his new album, "The Traveler." He'll be joined by two vocalists, **Grady Tate** and **Gretchen Parlato.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Two promising Cuban-born players split the week here. March 18-19: The saxophonist **Yosvany Terry** leads a quintet. March 20-22: The drummer **Dafnis Prieto** sets his foursome in motion. March 23: The **Mingus Big Band.** March 24: Outside In, a quartet led by the keyboardist **Gary Versace,** puts a contemporary spin on the music of the groups made up of organ, saxophone, guitar, and drums, which swarmed the country in the late fifties.

SMALLS
183 W. 10th St. (212-252-5091)—March 20: The pianist **Mike Longo,** a respected Dizzy Gillespie associate from the seventies, performs duets with the bassist **Santi DeBriano.** March 24: The **Ethan Iverson** trio. Iverson, the pianist from the Bad Plus, keeps his straight-jazz chops in fighting shape by stretching out with the bassist **Ben Street** and the superb veteran drummer **Albert (Tootie) Heath.**

THE STONE
Avenue C at 2nd St. (No phone)—March 21: The pianist **Marilyn Crispell,** who lives in the Catskills, drops by for two sets of improvisation. Crispell, now sixty-one, began her career as a New England Conservatory-trained classical pianist, then dropped out of music for several years before hearing John Coltrane's "A Love Supreme," which inspired her to switch to jazz and eventually move to Woodstock, New York, where she studied at Karl Berger's free-jazz-tinged Creative Music Studio. She went on to accompany Anthony Braxton for more than a dozen years, and her music often features dense, angular patterns reminiscent of his work. But it is in Crispell's aching, exquisite ballads that her unique voice is most pronounced. For the first set, she'll be performing solo; for the second, she'll be joined by **Lukas Ligeti** on drums and **Michelle Makarski** on violin.

TRIBECA PERFORMING ARTS CENTER
199 Chambers St. (212-220-1460)—March 19: The "Highlights in Jazz" series presents a night of spirited piano playing, with a double bill of **Cyrus Chestnut** and **Michael Wolff** and their trios.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—March 17-22: With the departure from his band of his onetime saxophone foil, Miguel Zenón, **David Sánchez** now fronts a lean quartet bolstered by the agile guitar playing of **Lage Lund.**

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Cast in Bronze: French Sculpture from Renaissance to Revolution."** Through May 24. ♦ **"Raphael to Renoir: Drawings from the Collection of Jean Bonna."** Through April 26. ♦ **"Art of the Korean Renaissance, 1400-1600."** Through June 21. ♦ **"Pierre Bonnard: The Late Interiors."** The great homebody's paintings—furiously dense still-lifes, interiors, and the odd self-portrait, made in the South of France in the two decades before his death, in 1947—go all out for encrusted dazzle, with drenching color that tilts toward enthusiastic orange, in one mood, and toward bashful violet, in another. The light is Mediterranean squared. The hour is lunchtime forever. The visual experience can suggest a happy flaw in your eyesight: incandescent cataracts. This is radical stuff, still. Tissues of sheer sensation, Bonnard's pictures stymie mental clarity as effectively as that postprandial extra glass of wine. Through April 19. ♦ **"Walker Evans and the Picture Postcard."** Through May 25. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Martin Kippenberger: The Problem Perspective."** Through May 11. ♦ **"Performance 1: Tehching Hsieh."** Through May 18. ♦ **"Words in Freedom: Futurism at 100."** Through April 6. ♦ **"a shimmer of possibility: Photographs by Paul Graham."** Through May 18. ♦ **"Projects 89: Klara Liden."** Through June 8. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860-1989."** Through April 19. ♦ **"The 2008 Hugo Boss Prize: Emily Jacir."** The artist, who divides her time between New York and Ramallah, exhibits a pair of conceptual works about Wael Zuaiter, a Palestinian killed by Israeli secret-service agents in Rome in 1972 in retaliation for the kidnapping and murder of Israeli athletes by Palestinian militants at the Munich Olympics. Zuaiter, a poet and an intellectual, was never conclusively linked to Black September, and Jacir's installation and related film elide thorny questions of his alleged culpability. What emerges instead—in pictures of Zuaiter with friends and family, a recording of Mahler's Ninth Symphony (which he loved), photographs of his extensive library and of postcards he sent on his travels, and written accounts of his murder—is a deeply moving memorial with a blatant political agenda. Through April 15. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—**"Jenny Holzer: Protect Protect."** Through May 31. ♦ **"Elad Lassry: Three Films."** Through April 30. ♦ **"Sites."** Through May 3. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"The Black List Project: Timothy Greenfield-Sanders and Elvis Mitchell."** Through March 29. ♦ **"Burning Down the House: Building a Feminist Art Collection."** Through April 5. ♦ **"Unearthing the Truth: Egypt's Pagan and Coptic Sculpture."** Through May 10. ♦ **"Hernan Bas: Works from the Rubell Family Collection."** Through May 24. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Climate Change: The Threat to Life and a New Energy Future."** Through Aug. 16. ♦ **"The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter."** Through May 25. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

ASIA SOCIETY
Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-288-6400)—**"Yang Fudong: Seven Intellectuals in a Bamboo Forest."** Through Sept. 13. (Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (212-849-8300)—**"Fashioning Felt."** Through Sept. 7. ♦ **"Shazia Sikander Selects: Works from the Permanent Collection."** Through Sept. 7. (Open Mondays through Thursdays, 10 to 5, Fridays, 10 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, noon to 6.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Masterpieces of European Painting from the Norton Simon Museum."** Through May 10. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**"Weird Beauty: Fashion Photography Now."** Through May 3. ♦ **"This Is Not a Fashion Photograph."** Through May 3. ♦ **"Edward Steichen: In High Fashion."** Through May 3. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

JAPAN SOCIETY
333 E. 47th St. (212-752-3015)—**"KRAZY! The Delirious World of Anime, Manga, and Video Games."** Through June 14. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 11 to 6, Fridays 11 to 9, and weekends, 11 to 5.)

MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"The Thaw Collection of Master Drawings: Acquisitions Since 2002."** Through May 3. ♦ **"On the Money: Cartoons for The New Yorker."** Through May 24. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—**"Broken Glass: Photographs of the South Bronx by Ray Mortenson."** Through April 12. ♦ **"Valentina: American Couture and the Cult of Celebrity."** Through May 17. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

NEUE GALERIE
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"Brücke: The Birth of Expressionism in Dresden and Berlin, 1905-1913."** Through June 29. (Open Thursdays, and Saturdays through Mondays, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 11 to 9.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

"MOON TEARS: MAPUCHE ART AND COSMOLOGY"
The Araucanians of southern Chile and Argentina held the tragic honor of being the last indigenous society in the Americas to resist European colonization. Though they were eventually "pacified" by the Chilean Army in the eighteen-nineties, their descendants, the Mapuche, still number more than eight hundred thousand and many continue to integrate shamanic traditions into everyday life. The ritual objects here, all on loan from the Domeyko Cassel collection, include bright textiles and beaded breast ornaments, stone axes and drums, some dating back to the seventeenth century. But the star attraction is the extensive array of jewelry crafted from "moon tears," or silver. For the Mapuche, intricately etched brooches, earrings, and necklaces are more than accessories—they're a material link to the spirit world. Through April 11. (Americas Society, Park Ave. at 68th St. 212-249-8950.)

Short List

JANE FREILICHER: De Nagy, 724 Fifth Ave. at 57th St. 212-262-5050. Through April 18. **DAN GRAHAM:** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Through March 28. **RICHARD PHILLIPS:** Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 212-744-2313. Through May 2. **FRANZ WEST:** Zwirner & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-517-8677. Through April 25. **"VIVAT REX! THE FIVE HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ACCESSION OF HENRY VIII":** Grolier Club, 47 E. 60th St. 212-838-6690. Through May 2.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

PHILIP-LORCA DICORCIA
A thousand of diCorcia's little Polaroids, installed end-to-end on thin metal shelves that snake through the gallery, may be more than anyone can absorb in one viewing, but their cumulative effect is stunning and invigorating. Included here are a busy career's worth of test shots, quick studies, and accidental double exposures or overexposures, as well as family photos, tourist snaps, and self-portraits, all arranged in carefully random order: a nude female torso, a wheat field, a hacked-up ham, the Eiffel Tower, skulls, hustlers, an alarm clock. The result is both a visual diary full of private allusions and a peek into the life of a working photographer—a hodgepodge, a feast, and one of the best shows in town. Through March 28. (David Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070.)

GEORG HEROLD
The German artist hails from the same school of slapstick formalism as Albert Oehlen and Martin Kippenberger (both onetime collaborators). More or less human figures, roughly constructed from wooden laths, perch on plywood tables in a low-rent pantomime of Sturm und Drang. In "Priest of Shame," a figure covers its eyes while masturbating with a bright-yellow boxing glove; in "The Human Factor," a kneeling supplicant has its head in the grip of a big, viselike claw. Two slinky sculptures covered in lacquered canvas—one pink, the other orange—look like Matisse cutouts on the lam at a strip club. Black-and-white photographs, shot in 1989, show Herold contorting as he tries to put his foot in his mouth—another piece, another punch line. Through March 21. (Petzel, 537 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9467.)

FLORIAN MAIER-AICHEN
This photographer's most accomplished and engaging gallery show so far rounds up a group of landscapes whose grounding in the real world is often tenuous. Using both subtle and blatant forms of digital manipulation, Maier-Aichen turns the lower acres of a mountain vista into a Pollock splatter canvas and defaces a snowy slope with a streaked smudge, as if from a huge eraser. The shoreline at Big Sur seethes with psychedelic color, as does the sky behind a black, craggy mountain borrowed from Caspar David Friedrich. Although this sounds terribly gimmicky, it looks smashing. Ansel Adams would be appalled, but Maier-Aichen doesn't just tweak landscape clichés, he reinvigorates the genre. Through April 11. (303 Gallery, 547 W. 21st St. 212-255-5566.)

FRANCESCA ROMEO / TEMA STAUFFER
These two young photographers approach portraiture from very different angles, but because their pictures are similarly fraught, complex, and compelling they complement each other nicely. Romeo, whose subjects are mostly friends and lovers on New York's bohemian fringe, combines intimacy and theatricality in pictures that make the most of available light, dark shadows, and tattooed flesh. Stauffer photographs strangers—young men she meets on the street of Binghamton, New York, who appear at once rebellious and vulnerable. This volatile combination is kicked up a notch by erotic tension, but Stauffer is tender rather than confrontational, and her work looks beyond the boys' cool affect to something warmer. Through April 18. (Cooney, 511 W. 25th St. 212-255-8158.)

JOHN STEZAKER
Stezaker's collages tend to involve the disorienting juxtaposition of two appropriated photographic sources—a blunt strategy with provocative results. His most accessible pieces (which make up more than half the exhibition) combine two movie-star head shots, one sliced and layered atop another to create a composite face. These literally split personalities are usually grotesque and funny mashups of male and female, teasing the fragility and porousness of identity. John Baldessari comes to mind, though other architecture-based works suggest Magritte's surreal dislocations of time and place, and a landscape/face collage recalls Dali at his most radical and unsettling. Through March 21. (Petzel, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9467.)

GARTH WEISER
No one could accuse Weiser of a Dionysian approach. His carefully worked canvases are packed with references to graphic design (corporate logos, the work of Herb Lubalin) and the lineage of geometric abstraction. Gray-scale wheels are anchored in fields of red or white. Hard, hand-painted edges abut soft, sprayed-on shapes. Black and white stripes pay buzzing homage to Op art. Weiser has a deft hand and an impressively cerebral approach to his medium, and his work is not without visual pleasures. But looking at his paintings can feel a bit like tackling the analytical-reasoning section of a standardized test. Through March 21. (Kaplan, 525 W. 21st St. 212-645-7335.)

Short List

JASON FOX AND HUMA BHABHA: Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000. Through April 18. **MATT KEEGAN:** D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-352-9460. Through April 25. **ELLSWORTH KELLY:** Marks, 522 and 526 W. 22nd St.; 523 W. 24th St. 212-243-0200. Through April 11. **ANDREW LORD:** Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300. Through March 28. **ADAM MCEWEN:** Klasgbrun, 520 W. 20th St. 212-243-3335. Through April 18. **RICHARD ALLEN MORRIS:** Peter Blum, 526 W. 29th St. 212-244-6055. Opens March 21. **YOSHITOMO NARA:** Boesky, 509 W. 24th St. 212-680-9889. Through March 28. **TONY OURSLER:** Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 212-206-7100. Through April 11. **TREVOR PAGLEN:** Bellwether, 134 Tenth Ave. 212-929-5959. Through April 4. **DANA SCHUTZ:** Feuer, 530 W. 24th St. 212-989-7700. Through April 25. **MUNGO THOMSON:** John Connelly Presents, 625 W. 27th St. 212-337-9563. Through April 4. **LISA YUSKAVAGE:** Zwirner, 533 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through March 28. **"BETTER HISTORY":** American Standard, 169 Tenth Ave., at W. 20th St. 646-649-4717. Through April 11.

DANCE

SAVION GLOVER
At the Joyce, the leading luminary of tap performs "Solo in Time," a side trip into flamenco. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. March 17-18 at 7:30, March 19-20 at 8, March 21 at 2 and 8, and March 22 at 2 and 7:30.)

IVY BALDWIN DANCE
Baldwin's work is highly theatrical, brimming with loopy ideas and evoking idiosyncratic characters and situations through music and her own slightly weird, highly specific movement language. For the creation of her new piece "Bear Crown," Baldwin travelled to Romania. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. March 18-21 at 7:30.)

JEREMY NELSON & LUIS LARA MALVACÍAS
After a year during which their professional schedules kept them largely apart, the longtime partners try an experiment, independently choreographing solos for themselves, then finding a way to put them together for their slot in the 92nd Street Y Harkness Dance Festival. "Sooner Than You Think" is about spaces, in the Bachelard sense, as concrete as a living room and as abstract as Hell. Four platforms, rearranged for each segment, frame the dancing, occlude it, and offer a surface against which Malvacías can bang his head. (Ailey Citigroup, 405 W. 55th St. 212-415-5500. March 18-19 and March 21 at 8 and March 22 at 2.)

HEIDI LATSKY DANCE
"Gimp" brings together dancers of the sort usually seen in performances, prime physical specimens such as the compact and explosive choreographer herself, with dancers whose joints are extended or whose limbs are crooked or foreshortened or missing. The idea is to expand our notions of beauty, a way of looking that the work makes self-evident when it isn't trying too hard. (Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-352-3101. March 19-21 at 8.)

DANCEBRAZIL
Count on the charming, virtuosic performers of DanceBrazil to wow with their physical prowess:

Simple Truth: It's important to weigh costs

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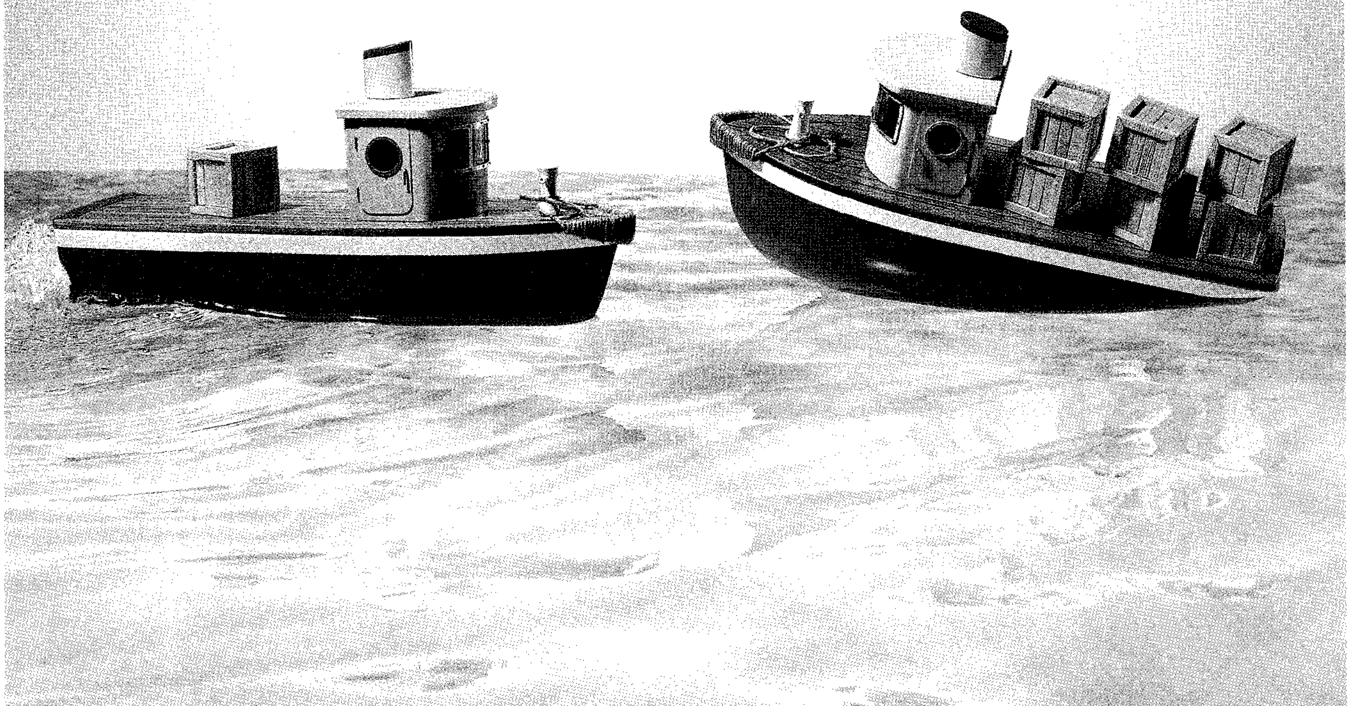

It's true. What's more, the more you invest and the longer you do it, the more costs can drag you down. For instance, applied to an initial $25,000 investment returning 8% before expenses, and compounded over 20 years, the difference adds up to about $20,000! So, as you can see, being below average can sometimes be a good thing. Vanguard. The simple truth about investing.**

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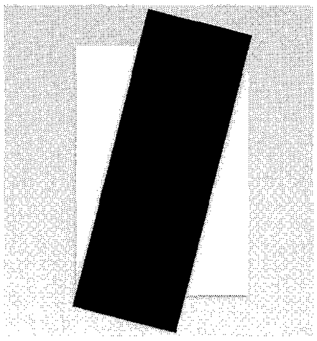
Visit www.vanguard.com/simpletruth, or call 877-527-4942, to obtain a prospectus, which includes investment objectives, risks, charges, expenses, and other information; read and consider it carefully before investing. Investments are subject to market risk. *Source: Lipper Inc. as of 12/31/2007. **Based on 2007 industry average expense ratio of 1.22% and Vanguard average expense ratio of 0.20%. Hypothetical example does not represent any particular investment. Simple Truth, The simple truth about investing, Vanguard, and the ship logo are trademarks of The Vanguard Group, Inc. ©2009 The Vanguard Group, Inc. All rights reserved. Vanguard Marketing Corporation, Distributor.

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
GOOD FORM

New paintings and old drawings by the eighty-five-year-old seraph of abstraction, Ellsworth Kelly, make for the finest show in town, at three spaces of the Matthew Marks gallery. Kelly's greatness has snuck up on us, in plain sight, for more than half a century. It's stark now. The newest works pair rectangular one-color canvases, one mounted diagonally across the other. Others are arrays of abutted vertical panels. All reduce drawing to the unframed edges of the supports, dramatizing colors that thrill like a trumpet voluntary. Sailing the walls, the paintings impart a conviction of strength in simplicity—or "sweetness and might," as Simon Schama once termed Kelly's ruling qualities. Drawings from the fifties and sixties, done in New York after Kelly's six eureka years in Paris, abstract bits of observed reality. They are sheerly fresh. Most masters of modern art look a mite dated now. Not Kelly, who has proven to be as up to date as the Parthenon, advancing a classical balance, between eye and mind, which alerts the body and clarifies the soul.

—Peter Schjeldahl



© ELLSWORTH KELLY, COURTESY MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY, N.Y.

the supple, powerful legs; the fluid backs, the shimmering footwork. Jelon Vieira—who directs the company—may not be the most refined or musically sophisticated of choreographers, but his pleasing fusion of Afro-Brazilian dance, capoeira, and American modern dance is tailor-made to showcase his beautiful dancers, especially the men. At Skirball Center, they present an excerpt of Vieira's "Ritmos" (an exploration of capoeira) along with a new work, "Inura," by the guest choreographer Carlos Dos Santos, a former member of the Alvin Ailey Repertory Ensemble. (566 LaGuardia Pl. 212-352-3101. March 19-21 at 8 and March 22 at 7.)

JULIAN BARNETT
A nostalgia for the shared experience of cassette tapes and boom boxes pervades "Sound Memory." Barnett, Justin Ternullo, and Hanna Kivioja each carry a tape player, and near the beginning of the piece Barnett skims a few dozen cassettes across the stage, air-hockey-style. Like teens holed up in a bedroom, they serially pop in tapes and dance for themselves and each other, threading through the strewn cassettes, singing along with "Sunday, Bloody Sunday." The selection of tapes seems random, until it becomes clear that it isn't. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. March 19-21 at 8:30.)

LAURA PAWEL DANCE COMPANY
Like many of the dancer friends who gather for her companionable concerts, chatting and easing through choreography new and old, Pawel has been quietly doing her own thing since the sixties. One aspect of that thing is humor, evident in the première of "They Might Be Mangoes" and in last year's "Better Than Being Guillotined." Another is mystery, evident in a trilogy of creature dances. (Baryshnikov Arts Center, 450 W. 37th St. 212-873-9073. March 20-21 at 8 and March 22 at 5.)

SIDIKI CONDE / TOKOUNOU
The sophisticated rhythms and lightning-quick footwork of traditional Guinean music and dance are highlighted by this troupe of eight performers, who dance, sing, and play the balaphon and kora—often all at once. The bandleader, Sidiki Conde, was born on the eastern border of Guinea, near Mali, and has worked as a musician and arranger for world-music legends such as Youssou N'Dour and Salif Keita; more impressive is the fact that, having lost the use of his legs to a childhood virus, he performs these vibrant dances on his hands, with no lack of dynamism or control. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-545-7536. March 20 at 8.)

SALLY SILVERS & DANCERS
In "Yessified!," the downtown iconoclast tackles the slippery subject of racial identity her way, at a slant. In solos for herself, she toys with a "white dialect" poem, tanning reflectors, baby bottles of white and chocolate milk, and an absurdly tiny electric guitar. The episodic ensemble sections, accompanied by electronically processed twenties jazz and sixties soul, reference basketball, violin playing, and other racially charged activities. But most of Silvers's famous wit works tangentially: a small woman besting a big man, a little dancer emerging from between two large ones, and many more evanescent delights. "Think harder," someone yells, and everyone grimaces. (P.S. 122, First Ave. at 9th St. 212-352-3101. March 22 at 6:30. Through March 29.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
Urged on by her leading lady, Natalie Dessay, Mary Zimmerman, the daring director who turned "Lucia di Lammermoor" on its head last season, has given Bellini's **"La Sonnambula,"** a frail but dreamy bel-canto masterpiece, a lighthearted, contemporary treatment—or so it would seem. Dessay and Juan Diego Flórez manage Bellini's coloratura with winning charm; Evelino Pidò draws sinuous lines and softly deferential timbres from the Met orchestra. (March 18 at 8 and March 21 at 1.) ♦ Before the magnificent Wagner soprano Waltraud Meier begins her excursion into the "Ring" cycle in April, she will do a turn as Santuzza in a revival of the reverent Franco Zeffirelli production of Mascagni's **"Cavalleria Rusticana,"** paired with its inevitable companion in verismo, Leoncavallo's **"Pagliacci."** Roberto Alagna and Charles Taylor join Meier in the first opera, with Nuccia Focile, Alberto Mastromarino, and Christopher Maltman joining Alagna in the second; Pietro Rizzo. (March 19 and March 23 at 8.) ♦ David McVicar's fine new production of **"Il Trovatore,"** featuring charismatic and capable singing from Sondra Radvanovsky, Luciana D'Intino, Marcelo Álvarez, and Dmitri Hvorostovsky; Gianandrea Noseda. (March 20 at 8.) ♦ Renée Fleming puts aside her reputation as a compulsive generalist and plays to her strengths in the title role of Dvořák's gentle fairy-tale opera **"Rusalka"**; her lambent soprano breathes unique life into the part of the pitiable water nymph who yearns to be human. The nonaggressive style of Otto Schenk's production—set in a rich, dewy, moss-laden grove—lets the story take shape in Dvořák's music, achieving almost mythic proportions. The excellent cast also features Christine Goerke, Stephanie Blythe, Aleksandrs Antonenko (in a stellar début, as the Prince), and Kate Lindsey; the Czech master Jiří Bělohlávek conducts. (March 21 at 8. This is the final performance.) ♦ Rolando Villazón, active in opera once more, is scheduled to sing Nemorino in a revival of **"L'Elisir d'Amore,"** in which he will be joined by such singers as Angela Gheorghiu, Franco Vassallo, and Simone Alaimo; Maurizio Benini. (March 31 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Zubin Mehta, fresh from his New York concerts with the Vienna Philharmonic, conducts a program featuring a new percussion duo, PercaDu, and an exciting recent work, "Spices, Perfumes, Toxins!," by the young Israeli composer of the moment, Avner Dorman. Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra completes the program. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. March 18-19 at 7:30, March 20 at 11 A.M., and March 21 at 8.)

"A CHILD OF OUR TIME"
A welcome part of "Honor!," Carnegie Hall's festival of African-American music, has been the programming of Michael Tippett's powerful yet rarely performed oratorio, which uses spirituals in much the same way that Bach employed Lutheran chorales in his Passions. It is the mission of this year's Carnegie Hall National High School Choral Festival, with its standout students joined by a professional quartet of vocalists (including the soprano Angela M. Brown and the bass Morris Robinson); Craig Jessop conducts. (212-247-7800. March 20 at 8.)

MUSICA SACRA
Kent Tritle's stimulating choral series offers Brahms's "German Requiem" not in its full-orchestra guise but in the composer's surprisingly effective version for piano four-hands, with the honors going to the renowned accompanist Margo Garrett and a protégée, Sunglee Victoria Choi, who will also accompany the baritone John Michael Moore in Mahler's "Songs of a Travelling Journeyman" (long known, incorrectly, as "Songs of a Wayfarer"). (Rose Theatre, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500. March 20 at 8.)

ORPHEUS CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
The ensemble, commissioning works inspired by each of Bach's Brandenburg Concertos, offers the première of Melinda Wagner's "Little Moonhead" in a concert also featuring Haydn's Symphony No. 6 ("Le Matin"), Stravinsky's "Pulcinella" Suite, and Piazzolla's "Four Seasons

of Buenos Aires" (with the irrepressible Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg). (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. March 21 at 8.)

AMERICAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Leon Botstein's intrepid group makes a foray into the music of William Grant Still (1895-1978), the first African-American to achieve a major reputation as an orchestral composer. Still's "Darker America," "Africa," and Symphony No. 2 share the program with other pioneering American works by Chadwick and Varèse ("Offrandes"). (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-868-9276. March 22 at 3.)

ACADEMY OF ANCIENT MUSIC
One of the great ensembles of the early-music movement, now led by Richard Egarr, comes to Zankel Hall to perform all six of Bach's Brandenburg Concertos. (212-247-7800. March 23 at 7:30.)

LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA: "RUSSIAN DREAMS"
The music of Sergei Prokofiev gets a big boost from Valery Gergiev, who will lead all of the composer's symphonies over a four-concert cycle this month. March 23 at 8: The bright Symphony No. 1 ("Classical") and the engrossing Symphony No. 6 in E-Flat Minor, punctuated by a performance of the steely Piano Concerto No. 2 in G Minor (with Vladimir Feltsman). ◆ March 24 at 8: A performance of the Violin Concerto No. 1 by Vadim Repin, an always persuasive soloist, is bookended by the complex Symphony No. 2 in D Minor and the blithe, valedictory Symphony No. 7 in C-Sharp Minor. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-6500.)

RECITALS

TAKÁCS QUARTET: THE BARTÓK QUARTETS
The earthy yet distinguished half-Hungarian ensemble essays the composer's six masterworks in three concerts, with a little Beethoven added in. Its second program includes the Quartets Nos. 2 and 5, along with Beethoven's Quartet in G Major, Op. 18, No. 2. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500. March 18 at 8.)

MATA "INTERVAL" SERIES: "PLAY!: MUSIC FOR TOYS"
Margaret Leng Tan, the doyenne of the toy piano, is the special guest in the next concert of the series promoting young composers and performers, which also features the "balloon artist" Judy Dunaway and the ensemble Transit. (Issue Project Room, 232 Third St., Brooklyn. www.issueprojectroom.org. March 18 at 8.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER: "AROUND PROKOFIEV"
After inviting a raft of guest artists for its round of Prokofiev concerts, several of the Society's core members—including the pianists Gilbert Kalish and Wu Han and the violinist Ani Kavafian—close the series by performing music by Ustvolskaya, Schoenberg (the Phantasy for Violin and Piano), Prokofiev's great friend Myaskovsky, and the man himself (the Sonata for Cello and Piano). (Rose Studio, Lincoln Center. 212-875-5788. March 19 at 7:30.)

ANONYMOUS 4
Few groups—with the exception of Corpus Christi Church's fine professional choir, which this concert benefits—better define the church's early-music sensibility than the renowned female vocal quartet, which (under the sponsorship of the Friends of Liturgical Music at Corpus Christi) will perform not only "A Medieval Ladymass," a sequence of ancient British chants and polyphony, but a little preview of their upcoming album, "The Cherry Tree." (529 W. 121st St. 212-666-9266. March 19 at 7:30.)

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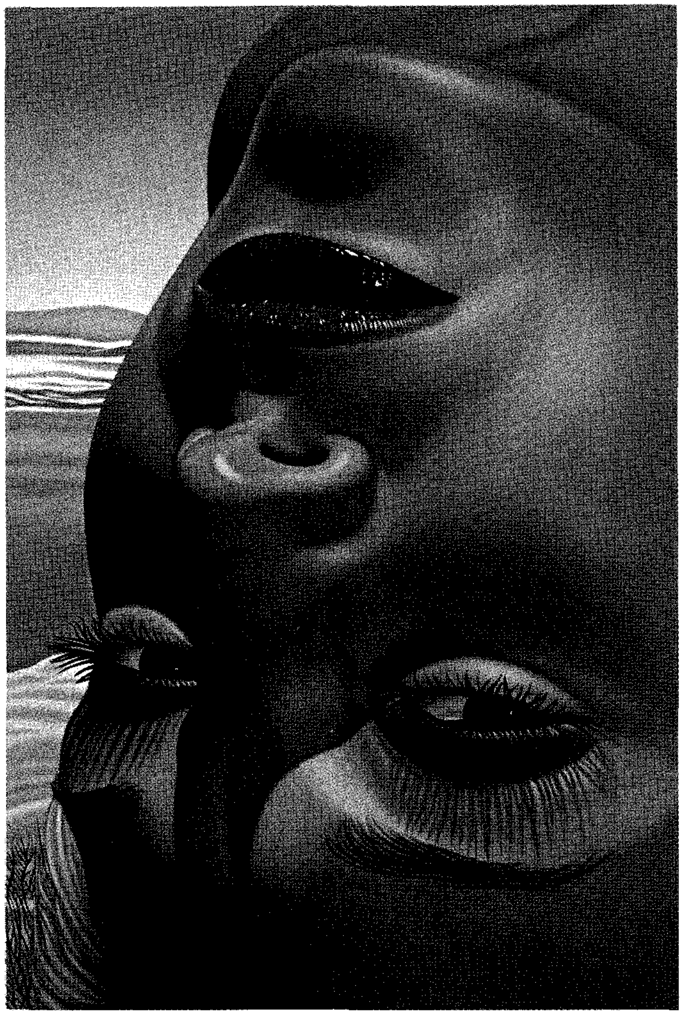
QUATUOR EBÈNE
The dynamic young French string quartet—as well known for its dashing performances of pop and jazz music as for its auspicious command of the classics—comes to Carnegie's Weill Recital Hall to offer works by Mozart, Brahms (the Quartet in C Minor), and Ravel. (212-247-7800. March 20 at 7:30.)



Richard Phillips's painting "Der Bodensee," at Gagosian.

BARGEMUSIC
March 20 at 8: David Leisner, one of New York's most admired guitarists, performs a solo recital of works by Villa-Lobos, Paganini (the Grand Sonata), the Polish Romantic Wenzeslaus Matiegka, and himself. ◆ March 21 at 8 and March 22 at 3: A typical Barge mixture of superb younger and more established artists (including the clarinettist Alexander Fiterstein and the pianist Alon Goldstein) offers a program featuring Schumann's Fantasiestücke, Op. 73, and the Quintets for Piano and Winds by Mozart and Beethoven. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083. For full schedule, see www.bargemusic.org.)

TAMARA MUMFORD AND KEN NODA
Two fixtures of the Metropolitan Opera—the young mezzo-soprano and the pianist—concertize at the Metropolitan Museum, offering songs by Rachmaninoff, Haydn, Ravel ("Shéhérazade"), Ned Rorem, and William Bolcom. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. March 21 at 7.)

"THIRD MIND LIVE": LA MONTE YOUNG
The Guggenheim Museum is offering a series of concerts that explore how Asian influences have filtered through the works of prominent American experimentalist composers. Young, the titan of West Coast minimalism, performs in an evening with Marian Zazeela and the Just Alap Raga Ensemble that features the composer's magnum opus, "Raga Sundara." (Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3587. March 21 at 9.)

ZUKERMAN CHAMBERPLAYERS
The ensemble, a favorite at the 92nd Street Y, joins the pianist Yefim Bronfman to perform two bedrock classics, Mozart's Piano Quartet in E-Flat Major and Schubert's "Trout" Quintet. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. March 22 at 3.)

"HONOR!" FESTIVAL: "THE VOICE"
The power of the voice is at the burning center of black music. Carnegie Hall concludes its three-week festival of African-American music appropriately, bringing in a clutch of superb singers—including the sopranos Harolyn Blackwell and Nicole Cabell and the bass-baritone Eric Owens—who will pay tribute through performance to such legendary predecessors as Marian Anderson, Paul Robeson, and Roland Hayes. (212-247-7800. March 23 at 8.)

MOVIES OPENING

BOB FUNK
A comedy, directed by Craig Carlisle, about a bed salesman (Michael Leydon Campbell) who falls for his new colleague (Rachael Leigh Cook). Opening March 20. (Quad Cinema.)

DUPLICITY
Tony Gilroy wrote and directed this drama, starring Julia Roberts and Clive Owen as rival corporate spies who are also lovers. Co-starring Tom Wilkinson and Paul Giamatti. Opening March 20. (In wide release.)

THE GREAT BUCK HOWARD
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening March 20. (In wide release.)

HEARTS AND MINDS
A rerelease of Peter Davis's 1974 documentary, about the Vietnam War. Opening March 20. (Cinema Village.)

HUNGER
A drama, by the British director Steve McQueen, about the I.R.A. militant Bobby Sands and his hunger strike. Starring Michael Fassbender and Stuart Graham. Opening March 20. (IFC Center.)

I LOVE YOU, MAN
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening March 20. (In wide release.)

KNOWING
A thriller about a teacher (Nicolas Cage) who sees the predictions of a time capsule come true. Directed by Alex Proyas. Opening March 20. (In wide release.)

SIN NOMBRE
A thriller, directed by Cary Joji Fukunaga, about a teen-ager from Honduras (Paulina Gaitan) who attempts to reach the United States via Mexico. In Spanish. Opening March 20. (In limited release.)

SKILLS LIKE THIS
A comedy, directed by Monty Miranda, about a failed writer (Spencer Berger) who turns to crime. Co-starring Brian D. Phelan. Opening March 20. (Angelika Film Center.)

SPINNING INTO BUTTER
Mark Brokaw directed this drama, about a college dean (Sarah Jessica Parker) who must respond to a hate crime. Opening March 20. (Sunshine Cinema.)

VALENTINO: THE LAST EMPEROR
Matt Tyrnauer directed this documentary, about the fashion designer. Opening March 18. (Film Forum.)

WE PEDAL UPHILL
Roland Tec directed this drama, comprised of thirteen vignettes derived from news items. Opening March 20. (Cinema Village.)

NOW PLAYING

ALEXANDER THE LAST
The latest film from the mumblecore (i.e., micro-budget) writer-director Joe Swanberg arrays the usual mumblecore obsession (romantic relationships among a small group of semi-articulate people) around a local theatre production. A married actress (Jess Weixler) contemplates an affair with a good-looking actor she's working with (Barlow Jacobs), only to discover that her sister (Amy Seimetz), with whom she's very close, is sleeping with him. In the past, Swanberg relied on a slapdash collage method of storytelling, with many relationships left hanging, to express a cool contempt for routine commercial filmmaking, but in this movie he's advancing toward a firmer structure and more emotionally explicit scenes. In its formal symmetries, the story suggests a stuttering version of one of Éric Rohmer's narratives of advance and retreat in "Six Moral Tales." Yet mumblecore's pleasures still lie in the sparks the actors strike in one another. Many of them suggested or added material to Swanberg's idea; the scenes are semi-improvised. With Justin Rice.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 3/16/09.) (IFC video on demand.)

THE CLASS
Extraordinary. François Bégaudeau, a teacher in a Parisian public school in the Twentieth Arrondissement, published a novel in 2006 chronicling a year in his classroom. Along with the director Laurent Cantet and the writer Robin Campillo, he then condensed and reshaped the material into a two-hour drama centering on the teacher (Bégaudeau, playing himself) and a small number of students (all played by actual students, though not the same ones he wrote about). Bégaudeau, who is in his thirties, is handsome, lean, and quick, with a strong voice; his slouching or rowdy fourteen-year-olds are mostly of African or Caribbean descent—still outsiders in France, and rightfully touchy about it. Some of them are resistant to education, which disrupts the pleasures of adolescence, and Bégaudeau aggressively comes after them, challenging, correcting, teasing, criticizing. The students are alive to him and come back hard, questioning French notions of discipline and manners. In all, "The Class" is a prime document of French post-colonial blues, though its relevance to American urban education could not be any greater if it had been shot in the Bronx or Trenton or South Los Angeles. In French.—*D.D.* (12/22 & 29/08) (In limited release.)

CORALINE
The spindly metal claw, like a tarantula made of steel, squeezes under a door and comes right at you; the hummingbirds hover before your face. The animated "Coraline," seen in its 3-D version, now and then uses the third dimension aggressively, for nose-biting or swooping effect, but most of the time, the writer-director Henry Selick, working with Neil Gaiman's novel, extends his reach into space as a way of increasing mobility and adventure—as a gift to imagination. There's a lot of barrelling through tunnels and dashing into rooms, and also some very startling effects, such as when the heroine, Coraline (voiced by Dakota Fanning), a spunky eleven-year-old girl, is walking with an all-knowing cat (Keith David) and both of them are under the control of a witch who suddenly, piece by piece, turns everything around them into white blankness. All dimensions, it seems, can be erased. Coraline longs for more attention than she's getting from her parents, so she enters a parallel world in which her parents are very attentive indeed—so attentive that they want to take control of her and sew buttons into her eyes and turn her into a ghost child. Scary and elegant.—*D.D.* (3/2/09) (In wide release.)

THE DEAD ZONE
Christopher Walken is fascinating as a tormented psychic in David Cronenberg's film of Stephen King's novel. Walken's character, a teacher named Johnny Smith, emerges from a five-year coma as a paranormal superhero. He has the power to see the future and to ferret out the secrets of the past. He's also a victim: his fiancée (Brooke Adams) married another man during Johnny's unconscious half decade. And he's a bit of a martyr: each time he has a vision, he loses physical strength. Walken's "normal" range of emotion has always been far out, and here he seems to throw his consciousness to the camera the way a ventriloquist throws his voice to a hand puppet. In several frightening trance scenes, his throbbing, spooky-eyed expressions blend eerily well with Cronenberg's hyperbolic visuals. Despite Jeffrey Boam's primitive script, Walken never lets up. Released in 1983.—*Michael Sragow* (IFC Center; March 20-21.)

GOMORRAH
A hell of a film, if you can take the hell. Matteo Garrone's movie is adapted from a 2006 book, an inflamed investigation of organized crime in Naples, by the journalist Roberto Saviano. The screen version is no less shocking, but Garrone, unlike Saviano, keeps his cool—as he needs to, with five separate narratives to juggle. We get a pair of teen-agers who dream of becoming sadistic big shots, although the camera catches something instantly pathetic in their delirium. (Watch them standing on a lonely beach in their underpants, firing stolen guns at nothing at all.) We get a kid who carries drugs for the Camorra, the Neapolitan Mafia, the innocence seeping from him with every favor. Then, there are three men who look as if they could be related (it must be deliberate casting). One is a tailor who moonlights as a teacher for Chinese immigrant workers; another hands out money in the Mob-ruled warrens of a northern suburb; the third dumps toxic waste into the sump of the countryside. These are finely gauged performances (Salvatore Cantalupo's heartbreaking one, as the tailor, being the standout), but Garrone went one better by recruiting locals into the minor roles, and the whole project has a dangerously authentic smell. Yet the movie stirs beyond documentary, ending up as a controlled rumination on the cruelty of fate; most of the characters are as flies to wanton boys, and they don't come more wanton than the Camorra. In Italian (or, rather, Neapolitan).—*Anthony Lane* (2/23/09) (In limited release.)

I LOVE YOU, MAN
No one would mistake the director John Hamburg for Ingmar Bergman, but his brittle, glossy comedy, despite its intermittently entertaining antics, leaves a long and bitter aftertaste of the haut-bourgeois blues. It's set in the now defunct milieu of the go-getting real-estate business and stars Paul Rudd as Peter Klaven, a hardworking young Los Angeles broker who is about to marry. His fiancée, Zooey Rice (Rashida Jones), has a tart-tongued posse of friends to dish with and fill out the wedding party, but Peter, for whom love and work are all, has none, and goes on a series of "man dates" to expand his purview. The buddy he ends up with, Sydney Fife (Jason Segel), an overgrown adolescent with mysterious resources and seemingly no inner life, pushes into Peter's world and creates problems for the couple. The humor is all verbal—there's little visual and physical invention—but it's clever and sometimes touching, as when Peter repeatedly stumbles over

JESSIE WENDER

TABLES FOR TWO
BUTTERMILK CHANNEL

BUTTERMILK
CHANNEL
BROOKLYN, NY

524 Court St., at Huntington St., Brooklyn (718-852-8490)—This is a restaurant determined to be of and for its neighborhood. Its name refers to the stretch of water between Governors Island and Brooklyn (there's a helpful map on the back of the menu). The décor is simple—an unadorned brick wall, paned windows, two big mirrors—though there are touches of whimsy: a goldfish bowl on a shelf above the bar, draped with a dog tag ("Ackerman"), its lone inhabitant circling underneath a miniature disco ball. The prices are reasonable, the beers are from New York state, and there's a Merlot made by Brooklyn Oenology, based in Greenpoint ("They don't actually grow the grapes there," a waitress noted). The bathroom harbors a poster for "Cowboy from Brooklyn" (Dick Powell, Priscilla Lane, Ronald Reagan), which might be more instructive than intended. It's the story of a man pretending to be something he is not; there's a sense, at times, that Buttermilk Channel works awfully hard to appear effortlessly congenial. You can't fault the restaurant for popularity, but a three-hour wait for a table doesn't seem very neighborly.

Despite the friendliness of the staff and the owner, Doug Crowell, who is an indefatigably cheerful presence, the feeling persists on the scattershot menu—fried chicken and waffles here, herb-crusted hake there. The former was juicy, though the exterior was almost tooth-shatteringly crunchy, and the accompanying cheddar waffles were spongy, as if they had languished under a heat lamp. The latter was splendid: delicate but firm, set in a thick savory stew of linguica and kale. Once you notice it, dissonance is everywhere. The duck meat loaf, with creamed spinach and duck jus ("You've got to get all of it together in one bite," the waitress advised), was rich and complex, but jarringly overshadowed by an enormous onion ring. There's much that is superb: a big, chewy burger, with aggressively sharp cheddar and sweet grilled onions; a flaky squash tart, with layers of buttery pastry and creamy ricotta. Other dishes fall flat: a special of rabbit had an unpleasantly persistent vanilla undertone; chunks of smoked bacon overwhelmed the creamy cauliflower-and-apple soup.

Homeliness reigns on the dessert menu: apple-cider doughnuts, a root-beer float, oatmeal-raisin cookies. The standout is diabolically simple—the gooey interior of pecan pie, wedged between layers of soft butter-pecan ice cream and topped with whipped cream. It's named after Crowell, and the waitress comes equipped with the backstory. "His family doesn't like pecan pie, so growing up he never got to eat it. But now he owns a restaurant." (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays for dinner, Sundays for brunch and dinner. Entrées $11-$20.)

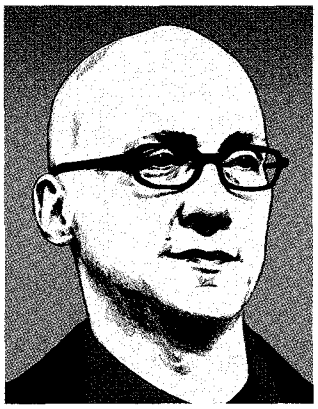
—*Andrea Thompson*

POWER LUNCH
OVER THE FRESHES
NEW SERVICE TO TOKYO

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
PRIVATE EYES

Before he directed the hilarious "Superbad," in 2007, Greg Mottola wrote and directed the 1996 independent film "The Daytrippers" (which Moving Image will screen at the D.G.A. Theatre on March 22). It may be the most delicate comedy ever made on the subject of how people get on each other's nerves. Hope Davis plays a Long Island teacher who suspects that her husband (Stanley Tucci) may be having an affair in Manhattan. She rides into town with a vengeful posse—her parents (Anne Meara and Pat McNamara), her sister (Parker Posey), and her sister's boyfriend (Liev Schreiber)—and they all spend the day tracking the husband's whereabouts while falling into bizarre adventures in a city that seems composed exclusively of voluble egotists. The tone is both satirical and heartfelt, and Schreiber plays a failed intellectual with such palpable chagrin that one almost sheds tears for him. Marcia Gay Harden, Campbell Scott, and many others shine in a movie that is disciplined yet freewheeling.

—*David Denby*



PAUL WILLOUGHBY

terms of male endearment. It runs on the old Mars-Venus dichotomy of emotional repression versus expression, but brings out a far stranger and more specific current of underlying discord, regarding the isolating comforts of prosperity, the fault lines of friendships, and the murky depths of what passes for love. With Jon Favreau, Jane Curtin, J. K. Simmons, and Lou Ferrigno as himself.—*Richard Brody* (In wide release.)

MADEA GOES TO JAIL

Tyler Perry's alter ego, the housecoat-wearing, six-foot-six force of nature, Madea, returns in this hit-or-miss soap opera, the latest in a long string of hits from Perry's Atlanta movie factory. The plot concerns a sensitive district attorney (Derek Luke) who tries to help a heroin-addicted prostitute (Keshia Knight Pulliam) while his selfish, status-seeking fiancée fights him every step of the way. When Madea enters the fray (she doesn't serve much jail time), she forcefully delivers her usual no-nonsense advice and, as a comic tornado, gives the predictable melodrama some much needed energy. There's not much here that Perry hasn't done before, and he still has trouble blending comedy and drama engagingly (his films work only fitfully), but his imposing, cross-dressing creation is riveting. With Madea, he attains an undeniable cultural relevance that's both madcap and redemptive.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

MASTER OF THE HOUSE

In this dark domestic comedy, from 1925, Carl Theodor Dreyer addresses his lifelong theme—the oppressive rules of respectable society—in a deceptively straightforward story. John, a failed businessman and threadbare clerk, is a tyrant to his children and an ingrate to his devoted wife, Mary. To set him straight, his former nanny, a sharp-witted, clear-eyed old woman, contrives to move in and get Mary out of town for a while so that John may learn to appreciate her exertions. Nanny proves a stern taskmistress, and she is revealed to have been even rougher on John in his childhood; his regression makes clear to him not only the cruelty he inflicts but, more important, the cruelty that was long ago inflicted on him. If he is a monster, he is a monster made; Dreyer's small-scale comedy, with its meticulous depiction of the thousand little chores of domestic order and occasional flashes of visual brilliance and startling symbolism, is nothing less than a child's muted cry of rage against the eternal elders. Silent.—*R.B.* (BAM; March 24.)

MR. BLANDINGS BUILDS HIS DREAM HOUSE

This realistic comedy, from 1948—in which a New York adman (Cary Grant) hauls his wife (Myrna Loy) and daughters from their cramped city apartment to a custom-built Connecticut roost and thereby turns his life upside down—is a scattershot catalogue of postwar civilization's middle-class discontents. The opening scenes, with their stickily intimate details of bathroom-sharing, set the tone for the film's down payment on such big-ticket items as class and race relations, media politics, and shadow zones of untapped desire. Grant's chirpy impulsiveness contrasts uneasily with the acute, ironic voice of the narrator, Melvyn Douglas, who plays a lawyer, Blandings's best friend and Mrs. Blandings's former suitor. The story appropriately veers off into marital discord, bureaucratic anguish (building permits, hidden fees), and alienated intellect (advertising's vain agony), while a host of post-"Citizen Kane" devices, ranging from the novelistic to the cartoonish, point in the direction of the comic modernism of Jerry Lewis and Frank Tashlin. If the ingredients don't completely jell under H. C. Potter's direction, no matter: unlike the Spam-copycat product that Blandings ballyhoos, this dark-hued, lightly sweetened tale is still remarkably meaty.—*R.B.* (MOMA; March 18-20.)

THE RULES OF THE GAME

Perhaps the most influential of all French films, and one of the most richly entertaining. Jean Renoir's legendary butchered and then restored masterpiece is a farce about a large houseparty, gathered for a hunt, where the servants and masters begin to chase and shoot each other. The party at the country château is a tragicomic world in motion; ironically, once the whole mechanism is spinning, the man who begins at the center of it—the romantic aviator (Roland Toutain)—is flicked off. With Marcel Dalio as the Marquis, Julien Carette as the poacher, Nora Gregor as Christine, and Renoir as Octave. The script, by Renoir, assisted by Carl Koch, was derived from Alfred de Musset's "Les Caprices de Marianne." Released in Paris in 1939 after being cut by the distributors; cut again after violent audience reactions; banned as demoralizing by the Vichy government and then banned by the Nazis. The original negative was destroyed when the Allies bombed the studios at Boulogne; the picture was reassembled (from two hundred cans of film and bits of soundtrack) and restored in the late nineteen-fifties.—*Pauline Kael* (MOMA; March 20.)

SUNSHINE CLEANING

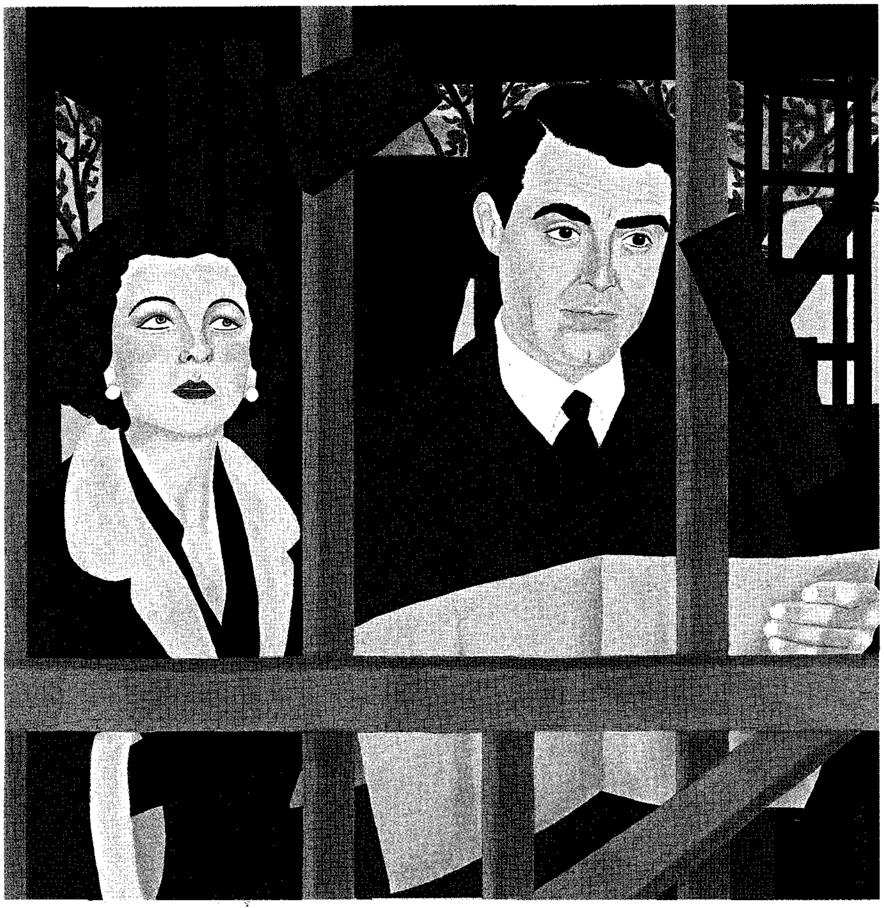
As any actor will tell you, goodness, of all the character traits, is one of the hardest to make interesting. The young Amy Adams, with her doll-like appearance—blue eyes, red hair, very pale skin—has what can only be called a gift for portraying generosity, optimism, and cheerfulness. She can make ingenuousness seem noble, by expressing a powerful will to find the best in life. In this Sundance-style independent movie, she plays an overburdened single mother living in Albuquerque. She looks after her kid, her scapegrace younger sister (Emily Blunt), and her affectionate but unsteady father (Alan Arkin), while carrying on a motel-room love affair with a married cop (Steve Zahn). Her school friends have married well, while she and her sister make a living entering shabby houses in which people have been murdered or committed suicide and then cleaning up the remnants of their lives. What draws them to this depressing line of work? That's the movie's mystery, which is only gradually revealed. The writer (Megan Holley) and the director (Christine Jeffs) might have gone further into danger and emotional loss; at times, "Sunshine Cleaning" borders on mere whimsy. But Adams, forging ahead gamely, keeps it aloft.—*D.D.* (Lincoln Square and Sunshine Cinema.)

TAKEN

Liam Neeson plays a divorced father and former C.I.A. employee, who lives in Los Angeles to be near his immensely annoying teen-age daughter (Maggie Grace). When she is kidnapped on a trip to Paris, he tracks her down, taking the opportunity to combine his two favorite cultural interests: tender paternal love and indiscriminate homicide. First, he slaughters the Albanians who stole her, before moving on to the Arabs who want to buy her, and you feel quite sure that he would, if required, slash and thump his way through the rest of the alphabet. For those with a taste for political allegory, there is something to ponder here, although the director, Pierre Morel, together with his producer (and co-writer) Luc Besson, takes things at such a clip that little room is left for contemplation. The result is unrelenting, improbable, and humorless; Neeson, as domineering as ever, shades his feats of aggression with a solemn gravity that they scarcely deserve, and anyone raised on "An American in Paris" will weep to think how far we have travelled from Gene Kelly. That was a fantasy of international ease; this is a bad dream of revenge. With Famke Janssen.—*A.L.* (2/2/09) (In wide release.)

TOKYO!

This three-part film, composed of half-hour segments set in the Japanese metropolis, directed by Michel Gondry, Leos Carax, and Bong Joon-ho, is an unfortunate triumph of intelligence over heart. Gondry's anecdote offers the most local color, featuring a comically struggling young filmmaker and his slacker girlfriend, in what begins as a sweet satire on the city's tight real-estate market and stringent job market (as shown in the rigorous test to which aspiring package-wrappers are subjected). The sketch veers off into a metaphorical special-effects dénouement that's as silly as it is offensive. Carax, who hasn't made a movie in a decade, comes back with "Merde," a political monster story that fuses Dostoyevsky's Underground Man with Quasimodo, "Beauty and the Beast," and contemporary terrorism. Denis Lavant valiantly throws himself into the role of a vengeful sewer-dwelling creature as the story careens from the slaughter of innocents to a courtroom circus and an execution. Carax's former poetic inventiveness seems hemmed in by doctrine (or just lack of practice); he appears mainly to enjoy flinging insults. Bong exercises his apocalyptic imagination in a trifle about a *hikikomori*, or agoraphobe, who is forced out of his cloistered life by an earthquake; though several images are striking, a gratuitous cyborg-centric conceit kills all feeling. This overly calculated project seems to respond to little inner need on the filmmakers' part. In Japanese, French, and a made-up monster language.—*R.B.* (Sunshine Cinema.)



"Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House," from 1948, at MOMA *March 18-20.*

DIVYA SRINIVASAN

TOKYO SONATA

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (IFC Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

TWO LOVERS

If this really is the swan song of Joaquin Phoenix, as the actor has vowed, then it's a fine-looking swan to go out on. He plays Leonard, who lives in Brighton Beach with his parents, works in the family's dry-cleaning store, and seems not just troubled in mind but, as it were, only half-formed as an adult member of society. Not that this stops him from attracting the attention of beautiful women; first comes Sandra (Vinessa Shaw), the daughter of his parents' friends, followed shortly by Michelle (Gwyneth Paltrow), whose apartment overlooks his own, and who can boast a range of perplexities almost as broad as his, what with her weakness for drugs and her reliance on the wallet of a married man (Elias Koteas). James Gray's film observes Leonard as he seesaws between these two alliances; as late as the final scene, we cannot tell which way he will tip, still less whether his choice will make him happy ever after. The overall result is a cramped and distressing movie that is somehow eased and opened out by its rich soundtrack and, above all, by the grace of its compositions. With Isabella Rossellini as Leonard's long-suffering mother.—*A.L.* (2/23/09) (In limited release.)

WATCHMEN

The names of many directors, including Terry Gilliam and Paul Greengrass, have been linked with this project over the years. Only now will they realize what a lucky escape they had. The task was to find a way of dramatizing Alan Moore's graphic novel—something of a cult among devotees, which means that, like all cults, it has escaped critical rigor. The helm was finally handed to Zack Snyder, who made the loopy but entertaining "300"; this time, he has conjured a work that forgets to entertain but somehow manages to bore, bewilder, and disgust. We are introduced to a band of former crime busters, now under threat: Nite Owl (Patrick Wilson), the Comedian (Jeffrey Dean Morgan), Dr. Manhattan (Billy Crudup), the lithe but witless Silk Spectre (Malin Akerman), a moneyed fop named Ozymandias (Matthew Goode), and, lastly, Rorschach (Jackie Earle Haley), who takes time off from merciless slaughter to narrate the proceedings. None of them is striking enough to hold our attention for long; their powers, superpowers, toys, and disguises seem wide-ranging but indeterminate, and any hint of political satire—as intended by the angry Moore—is drowned in a flood of brutal murk. The result takes infinite adolescent pleasure in its own nastiness and gives no pleasure in return. With Carla Gugino, a fine actress who should have stayed away.—*A.L.* (3/9/09) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

FADOS: Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. **THE LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT:** In wide release. **RACE TO WITCH MOUNTAIN:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—"Treasures IV: American Avant-Garde Film, 1947-1986." March 18 at 7:30: A short-film program, including "Notes on the Circus" (1962, Jonas Mekas). ♦ March 19 at 7:30: A short-film program, including "Riddle of Lumen" (1972, Stan Brakhage).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—Special screening. March 18 at 7:30: "Examined Life" (2008, Astra Taylor), followed by a Q. & A. with the philosopher Peter Singer and the director. ♦ The films of Carl Theodor Dreyer. March 19 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Ordet" (1955; in Danish). ♦ March 23 at 7: "The Bride of Glomdal" (1926; silent). ♦ March 24 at 7: "Master of the House" (†). ♦ The films of Paul Newman. March 20 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:30: "The Long Hot Summer" (1958, Martin Ritt). ♦ March 21 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Slap Shot" (1977, George Roy Hill). ♦ March 22 at 2 and 6:50: "Sometimes a Great Notion" (1971, Newman). ♦ March 22 at 4:30 and 9:30: "Quintet" (1979, Robert Altman).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. March 18-26 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Z" (1969, Costa-Gavras; in French).

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—The films of Robert Mulligan. March 18 at 4:15 and 8:45 and March 22 at 6:30: "Baby the Rain Must Fall" (1965). ♦ March 18 at 6:30: "The Stalking Moon" (1968). ♦ March 19 at 7 and March 23 at 9: "Bloodbrothers" (1978). ♦ March 19 at 9:10: "The Other" (1972). ♦ March 20 at 7 and March 22 at 8:30: "Summer of '42" (1971). ♦ March 20 at 9:15, March 21 at 4:30, and March 24 at 9: "The Man in the Moon" (1991). ♦ March 21 at 6:45 and March 23 at 3:30: "Up the Down Staircase" (1967). ♦ March 21 at 9:15 and March 22 at 4:30: "The Nickel Ride" (1974). ♦ March 22 at 2: "To Kill a Mockingbird" (1962).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through March 31: The films of Jacques Doillon. March 24 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "The Crying Woman" (1979; in French).

IFC CENTER

323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"After the Revolution: Cuba on Screen." March 20-22 at 11 A.M.: "Before Night Falls" (2000, Julian Schnabel). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." March 20-21: "The Dead Zone" (†).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Still Moving." March 18-20 at 1:30: "Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House" (†). ♦ March 20 at 8:30: "The Rules of the Game" (†), introduced by the critic Andrew Sarris. ♦ Special screenings. March 18-19 and March 23 at 4:30, March 20 at 6, and March 21-22 at 5: "C.R.A.Z.Y." (2005, Jean-Marc Vallée; in French). ♦ "Canadian Front 2009," a selection of contemporary Canadian cinema. March 18 at 7 and March 22 at 1: "The Necessities of Life" (2008, Benoît Pilon; in French and Inuktitut). ♦ March 19 at 6:15 and March 21 at 8:45: "Pontypool" (2008, Bruce McDonald). ♦ March 19 at 8:30 and March 22 at 2: "Mommy's at the Hairdresser" (2008, Léa Pool; in French). ♦ March 20 at 6:30 and March 21 at 2:30: "Nurse. Fighter.Boy" (2008, Charles Officer). ♦ March 20 at 8:30 and March 22 at 3: "The Death of Alice Blue" (2008, Park Bench).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—"Superday with Greg Mottola." The screenings will take place at the D.G.A. Theatre, 110 W. 57th St., Manhattan. The director will be present for all screenings. March 22 at 2: "Daytrippers" (1996, Mottola). The screening will be followed by a discussion with the actor Liev Schreiber and the director. ♦ March 22 at 4:30: "Superbad" (2007, Mottola), presented by the actor Kevin Corrigan and the director. ♦ In première. March 22 at 7:30: "Adventureland" (2009, Mottola). The screening will be followed by a discussion with the producer Ted Hope and the director.

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." March 20 at 9:30: "Howl's Moving Castle" (2004, Hayao Miyazaki), introduced by the actress Emily Mortimer.

READINGS AND TALKS

THE FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
The trilingual novelist Ananda Devi talks about her work. (22 E. 60th St. 212-307-4100. March 18 at 7.)

BOOK CULTURE
David Farley, Tony Perrottet, and Peter Wortsman read from their contributions to "The Best Travel Writing 2009: True Stories from Around the World." (536 W. 112th St. March 19 at 7.)

THE POWERHOUSE ARENA
Joseph Rivera, a former New York City police officer and the author of "Vandal Squad: Inside the New York City Transit Police Department, 1984-2004," talks shop with his former superiors on the squad, Steven Mona and Ken Chiulli, and the graffiti artists COPE2, Ket, and ELLIS G. The artist and graffiti curator Stern Rockwell is the moderator. (37 Main St., at Water St., Brooklyn. For more information, call 718-666-3049. March 19 at 7)

KGB BAR
A night of poetry, with Elena Karina Byrne and Joshua Beckman. (85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary. March 23 at 7:30.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"MONKEY KING"
Diane Wolkstein and two dozen other master storytellers take the stage for a marathon rendition of the epic Chinese tale "Monkey King: Journey to the West," in which a supernatural simian attempts to take over Heaven, is imprisoned for centuries, and then gets a chance to redeem himself by helping a determined monk on his quest for Buddhist scriptures in India. (La Salle Academy, 38 Second Ave., at 2nd St. March 20 from 7 to 10, March 21 from 10 to 10, and March 22 from 10 to 6. For more information, visit www.monkeykingepic.com.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
Christie's dominates the Asian-art auctions this week with four days of sales. A sale of Japanese and Korean art (March 17) is followed by two days of Chinese paintings, porcelains, and sculpture (March 18-19), with an auction devoted to works from the collection of the late philanthropist Arthur M. Sackler (March 18) and another (also on March 18) that includes a large selection of delicate jades—pots for brushes, vases, pendants—from the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. On the morning of March 19, attention shifts to South Asia, in this case modern and contemporary works from India and Pakistan; modern masters such as M. F. Husain (whose Picassoesque composition "Untitled" tops the sale) will be offered alongside work by artists several decades younger, such as Ravinder Reddy, whose sculpture is a kind of Pop-art reinvention of traditional representations of Hindu deities. The week closes with a day of Indian, Tibetan, Nepali, and Southeast Asian art (March 20), led by prized sculptures from a private collection, including a beautiful second- or third-century figure of an Atlas from Gandhara, his ample wings folded behind him as he smiles serenely. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ At **Sotheby's**, Asia week features Chinese ceramics and works of art (March 17) and a day dedicated to art from India and Southeast Asia (March 18). In the latter auction, pride of place is given to works by modern Indian artists; Akbar Padamsee's "Untitled (Nude)" from 1960, for example, is a coolly elegant composition in grays, while M. F. Husain's Cubist depiction of horses ("Untitled") is a prime exemplar of one of the artist's favorite subjects. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ If all this Asian art is making you a bit dizzy, **Doyle** offers a comfy alternative: the auction house's yearly "Dogs in Art" sale (March 24), featuring lovingly rendered pet portraits, hunting scenes, and, of course, a nineteenth-century portrayal of a fortune-telling Chihuahua ("Your Future Told"), by Cassius Marcellus Coolidge. (175 E. 87th St. 212-427-2730.)

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ON THE HORIZON

THE THEATRE
OFF WITH HER HEAD
March 30

Janet McTeer plays Mary, Queen of Scots, and Harriet Walter plays her archrival cousin, Elizabeth I, in Peter Oswald's new version of Friedrich Schiller's play "Mary Stuart." Phyllida Lloyd directs, at the Broadhurst. (212-239-6200.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
KLANG, KLANG, KLANG
April 4

The new Alice Tully Hall invites Austria's Klangforum Wien to perform daunting works by Georges Aperghis, Beat Furrer, Feldman, and Schoenberg in a concert that also features short films by Maya Deren, Man Ray, and others. (212-721-6500.)

ART
LETTER HEADS
April 4-June 15

In the nineteen-fifties, the Argentine León Ferrari and the Swiss-born Brazilian Mira Schendel began, independently, experimenting with language in paintings, sculptures, and works on paper. "Tangled Alphabets," at MOMA, is a dual survey of the modernists' works. (212-708-9400.)

MOVIES
AUTEUR, AUTEUR!
April 16-28

The Prix Louis-Delluc, for best French film of the year, named in honor of a great film critic, is awarded by a panel of French film critics, and sometimes they even get it right. BAM presents a dozen films spanning eight decades, including Robert Bresson's "Diary of a Country Priest," Maurice Pialat's "À Nos Amours," and Eric Rohmer's "Claire's Knee." (718-636-4100.)

NIGHT LIFE
HAIRY STUFF
May 26

The trio of Christopher Guest, Michael McKean, and Harry Shearer reprise their roles from the legendary "This Is Spinal Tap" at the Beacon Theatre, with one or two small twists. They are not turning it up to eleven (it's an acoustic show), and they are not dressing in costume (no wigs this time around). Given the quiet setting, expect more than a few "Mighty Wind" songs, too. (800-745-3000.)

A wigless concert by Spinal Tap, at the Beacon Theatre.

KIRSTEN ULVE

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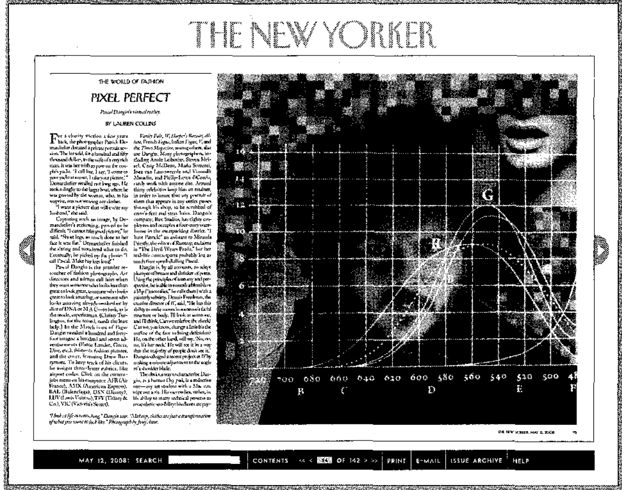
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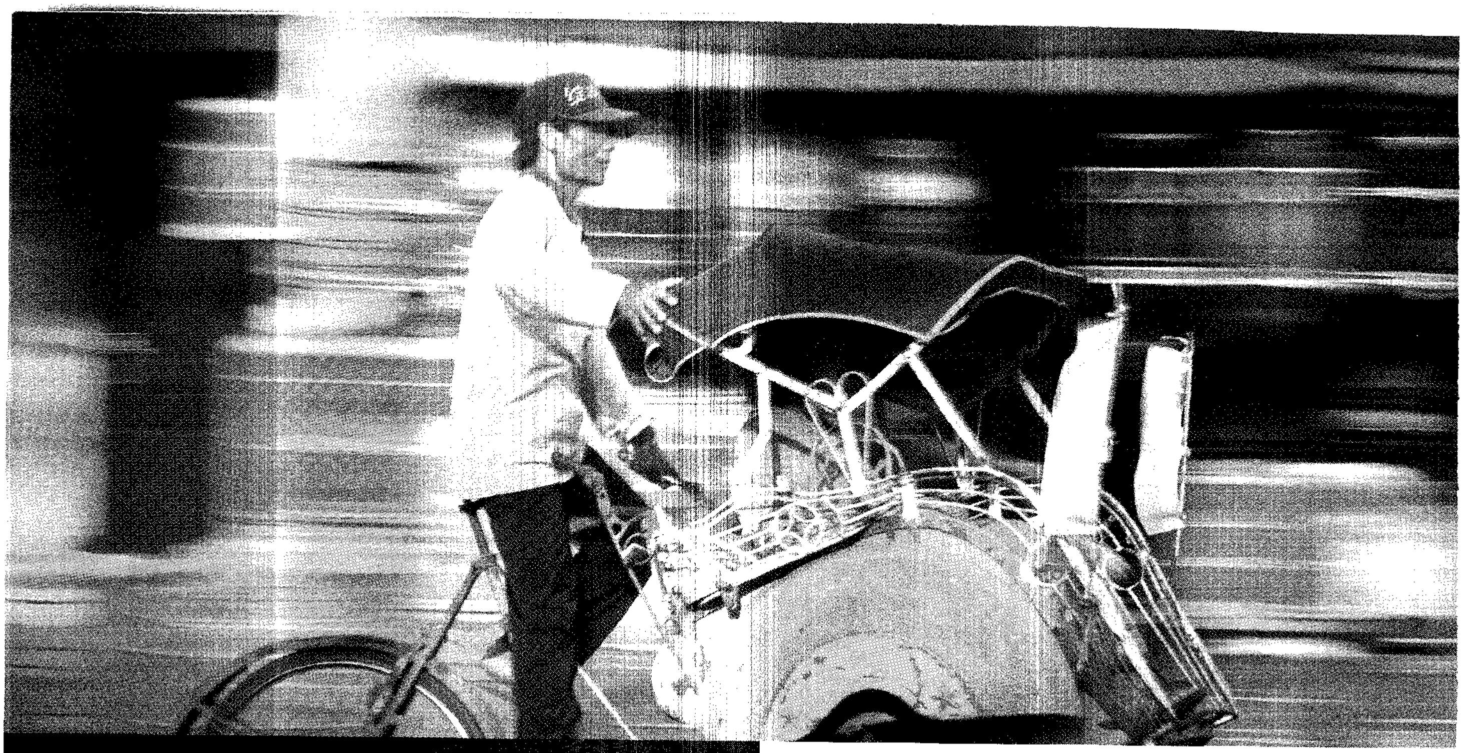

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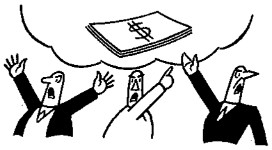
THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
NOT INSANE



On "Hardball" the other night, David Frum was complaining about the Republican Party—a popular activity at MSNBC, a cable news network whose prime-time hosts are non-Republicans, including "Hardball"'s Chris Matthews. Frum, however, is a non-non-Republican, and an overdetermined one: 1980 Reagan volunteer, Federalist Society activist, *Wall Street Journal* editorial-page editor, George W. Bush speechwriter ("axis of evil"), *National Review* contributing editor, American Enterprise Institute resident fellow. What conservatives are saying, he told Matthews,

> is increasingly not only counterproductive economically but also politically. We look like we don't care. We look like we're indifferent. We don't offer solutions. We're talking about a spending freeze in the middle of a 1929-30-style meltdown!

On ABC's "This Week," David Brooks, the *Times* columnist, was even more aghast. Brooks—whose conservative credentials (William F. Buckley, Jr., protégé, *Wall Street Journal* op-ed editor, *Weekly Standard* senior editor) aren't too shabby, either—said wonderingly, "There are a lot of Republicans up on Capitol Hill right now who are calling for a spending freeze in the middle of a recession slash depression. That is insane." Quite a lot of Republicans, actually, and they weren't just talking about it: On March 6th, John Boehner, the House Republican leader, made a motion on the floor for just such a freeze. His charges voted for it, a hundred and fifty-two to nothing.

The theory that preventing the United States government from spending more money will halt the cascading crisis of demand that threatens the world with recession slash depression is indeed crazy. And many Republicans, even as they rail against "government spending," at least understand that the government must *cause* more money to be spent, and that the fiscal deficit must rise in the process. They just want the government to do the job *indirectly*, by cutting taxes—especially taxes paid by the well-off, such as inheritance taxes, capital-gains taxes, corporate taxes, and high-bracket income taxes—in the hope that the money left untaxed will be spent. It is useless to point out to them that this approach was tried for eight years and found wanting, that in this economy the comfortable are less likely than the strapped to spend any extra cash that comes their way, that government spending often serves socially useful purposes, that "wasteful spending" is not a government monopoly (see corporate jets, golf-course "conferences," premium vodkas), and that the only way to insure that money is spent is, precisely, to spend it.

And yet, lurking underneath the anti-spending, pro-tax-cutting cant is one idea that might truly have merit. Frum mentioned it on that "Hardball" broadcast, touching off this rather cryptic exchange:

> FRUM: I'm for a big payroll-tax holiday that would go into effect immediately.
>
> MATTHEWS: I know about the payroll, uh—in other words, it gets money back in the hands of people who are working people, right?
>
> FRUM: Up to a hundred and twenty dollars per week per worker, starting last month.
>
> MATTHEWS: But it sounds like a liberal argument. The funny thing is, the liberals haven't pushed it. And I don't know why, because working people pay a very regressive tax when they go to work, right?

Right. The payroll tax—a.k.a. the Social Security tax, the Social Security and Medicare tax, or the Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA) tax—skims around fifteen per cent from the payroll of every business and the paycheck of every worker, from minimum-

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

wage burger-flippers on up, with no deductions. No exemptions, either—except that everything above a hundred grand or so a year is untouched, which means that as salaries climb into the stratosphere the tax, as a percentage, shrinks to a speck far below. This is one reason that Warren Buffett's secretary (as her boss has unproudly noted) pays Uncle Sam a higher share of her income than he does. In fact, three-quarters of American households pay more in payroll tax than in income tax.

Where income taxes are concerned, even Republicans seldom argue that taxing added income over a quarter million dollars at, say, thirty-six per cent rather than thirty-three per cent is wrong because the affluent need more stuff. They argue that making the rich richer enables them to create jobs for the non-rich. More jobs: that's a big argument for capital-gains and inheritance-tax cuts, too. But the payroll tax is a *direct tax* on work and workers—on jobs *per se*. If the power to tax is the power to destroy, then the payroll tax is, well, insane.

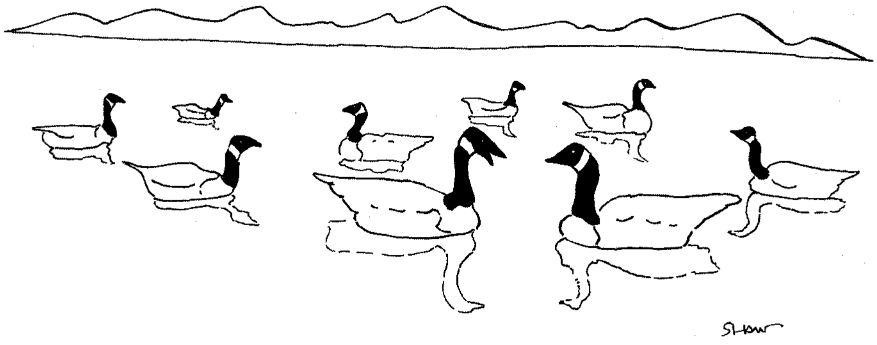
Frum is not the only Republican on the case. "If you want a quick answer to the question what would I do," Mitch McConnell, the Senate Republican leader, said recently, "I'd have a payroll-tax holiday for a year or two. That would put taxes in the hands of everybody who has a job, whether they pay income taxes or not." Other Republican politicians and conservative publicists have made similar noises. They haven't made it a rallying point, though; it would, after all, shape the over-all tax system in a progressive direction. Anyhow, their sincerity may be doubted: when President Obama proposed a much more modest cut along similar lines—a refundable payroll-tax credit of four hundred dollars—they denounced it as a welfare giveaway.

Liberals have been reticent, too. The payroll tax now provides a third of federal revenues. And, because it nominally funds Social Security and Medicare, some liberals regard its continuance as essential to the survival of those programs. That's almost certainly wrong. Public pensions and medical care for the aged have become fixed, integral parts of American life. Their political support no longer depends on analogizing them to private insurance. Besides, the aging of the population, the collapse of defined-benefit private pensions, the volatility of 401(k)s, and pricey advances in medical technology mean that, no matter what efficiencies may be achieved, Social Security and Medicare will—and should—grow. Holding them hostage to ever-rising, job-killing payroll taxes is perverse.

If the economic crisis necessitates a second stimulus—and it probably will—then a payroll-tax holiday deserves a look. But it's only half a good idea. A whole good idea would be to make a payroll-tax holiday the first step in an orderly transition to scrapping the payroll tax altogether and replacing the lost revenue with a package of levies on things that, unlike jobs, we want less rather than more of—things like pollution, carbon emissions, oil imports, inefficient use of energy and natural resources, and excessive consumption. The net tax burden on the economy would be unchanged, but the shift in relative price signals would nudge investment from resource-intensive enterprises toward labor-intensive ones. This wouldn't be just a tax adjustment. It would be an environmental program, an anti-global-warming program, a youth-employment (and anti-crime) program, and an energy program.

Impossible? A politically heterogeneous little group with the unfortunately punctuated name of Get America Working! has been quietly pushing this combination for twenty years. In one form or another, without much fanfare, it has earned the backing of such diverse characters as Al Gore and T. Boone Pickens, the liberal economist James Galbraith and the conservative economist Irwin Stelzer, Republican heavies like C. Boyden Gray and Democratic heavies like Robert Reich. It's ambitious, it jumbles ideological and partisan preconceptions, and it represents the kind of change that great crises open political space for. Does that sound like anyone you know?

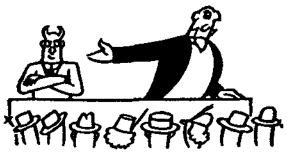
—*Hendrik Hertzberg*



"Instead of mating for life, why can't we just be a flock with benefits?"

THE BENCH

THE DOLOR OF MONEY



Until last week, the world had not heard from Bernard Madoff since before his arrest, on December 11th, or seen much of him. The footage of the appearance he made the week after his arrest has been replayed on TV many times; he's seen returning to his apartment, on East Sixty-fourth Street, after a trip to the federal courthouse, in lower Manhattan. He has on a black baseball cap and is wearing an enigmatic smile—a damnable smile, as it seemed to have meaning, and therefore put us in the decadent position of trying to figure out what that might be, when ultimately whatever it meant was beside the point. The facts of the case had more than enough meaning. Last week, Madoff made another trip to the courthouse, where his fate would be decided—or, rather, formalized, as he had already decided his own fate, by stealing billions of dollars from his investment clients. On Thursday, he pleaded guilty to the eleven felony counts against him, and Judge Denny Chin ruled that he be remanded. In other words, jail, not bail.

The proceeding was scheduled for 10 A.M., and anyone could attend. It was in many ways a normal day, albeit with a little more electricity in the air and more guards in the lobby. They were on high alert, but were also chatty; when a woman set off the metal detector, a guard told her to take off her shoes. "Shoe violation," he said. "Shoe violation?" she said back. The guard then sang the words "shoe violation" to the melody of "She Works Hard for the Money." The elevator going up to the twenty-fourth floor, where the hearing was held, was, as courthouse elevators usually are, redolent of breakfast pastries and the acrid smell of hot coffee meeting paper cup. But the courtroom was already full, and the overflow crowd had been sent down to a capacious jury room on the ground floor. The not very large screen that had been set up there and the blurry black-and-white picture on it were state-of-the-art for elementary schools in 1958, but they were sufficient to give good views of Madoff and his lawyer, Ira Lee Sorkin, and their team, sitting in a row at a long table.

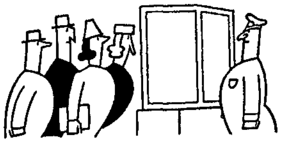
Judge Chin went through a series of questions designed to establish definitively that Madoff knew what he was doing in pleading guilty, and Madoff answered succinctly: Yes. No. Yes, I am. Yes, I have. Yes, Your Honor. No, it has not. I do. The maximum penalties for the charges were read; the two exquisitely unnecessary penalties were as satisfying to hear as the ones that involved fines and prison terms: each charge carried "a maximum term of supervised release of three years" and "a mandatory special assessment of a hundred dollars." Judge Chin, in a neutral tone, at last said, "Mr. Madoff, would you tell me what you did, please." Madoff, also speaking in a neutral tone, read aloud from a prepared statement, whose words were purportedly his own, detailing his crimes, and how he achieved them and concealed them for so long. Yet in this very statement, designed to clear the air, was language that betrayed even more lies, deceit, and pathological self-righteousness. You should have been there.

Madoff's opening lines were perhaps the richest, his second sentence alone speaking volumes: "I am actually grateful for this opportunity to publicly speak about my crimes, for which I am so deeply sorry and ashamed." Listeners didn't need to know that he was grateful, and we certainly didn't need him to underscore his gratitude with the word "actually," a semantic fillip that asked us to care how he felt about how he felt. As for his being "so" deeply sorry and ashamed, it's possible that we might have believed him a little bit if he had left out that sweet-talking, disingenuous "so." "Deeply sorry and ashamed": he didn't bother to separate "sorry" and "ashamed" into separate sentences and make them each stand alone and naked for a second, but delivered them as a singsong cliché.

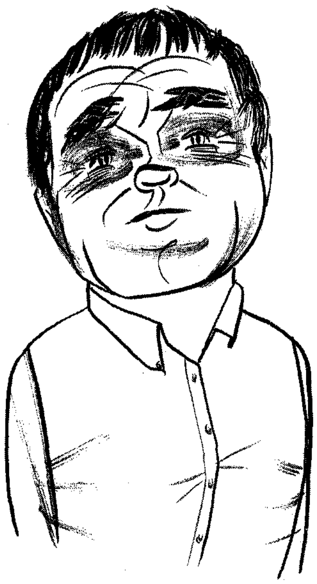
Two sentences later, Madoff said, "When I began the Ponzi scheme, I believed it would end shortly and I would be able to extricate myself and my clients from the scheme." As he read this, he betrayed no sense of how absurd it was to use the passive voice in regard to his scheme, as if it were a spell of bad weather that had descended on him. Still, he had faith—he "believed"!—that it would soon be over. Yes, "soon." In most of the rest of the statement, one not only heard the aggrieved passive voice but felt the hand of a lawyer: "To the best of my recollection, my fraud began in the early nineteen-nineties." One might have expected that the most dramatic moments would be Madoff's pleading guilty, eleven times in a row, to the charges against him, or hearing his victims speak. Only four victims spoke, and fairly briefly. One of them had hoped for a trial so that "we have more of a chance to comprehend the global scope of this horrendous crime." One wanted more "information as to where the money is and to find out who else may be involved in this crime." Another—improperly—addressed Madoff himself, and wondered whether he'd turned around to look at his victims in the courtroom. But it was Sorkin who set the stage for the day's biggest moment, with a sometimes grotesque spiel, in which he referred to "people who claim they lost money," and at one point, after having just referred to Ruth Madoff's "properties in Montauk, in New York, and Palm Beach," started a sentence with the words "At his wife's own expense." No one knew how the sentence was going to go on from there, because Sorkin was halted by sounds from the courtroom—a burst of dark laughter in response to his special pleading, even though special pleading is his job. As soon as Sorkin finished asking that Madoff's bail be continued, Chin said curtly, "I don't need to hear from the government. It is my intention to remand Mr. Madoff." Immediate applause, quickly tamped down by the Judge. Moments later, two court officers approached Madoff, who stood silently and still, and then he moved his arms a little so that his hands were behind his back. And then there was a click.

—*Nancy Franklin*

AT THE GALLERIES
GOLDLESS



The Los Angeles-based conceptual artist Chris Burden is known for topicality. During the Vietnam War, he had a friend shoot him in the arm with a .22-calibre rifle. After Watergate, he bought airtime on local TV and, he says, "became the first artist to make a full public financial disclosure" (net income: a thousand and fifty-four dollars). In keeping with the current economic mood, he recently started planning a show about weights and measures and the real value of things. For one of the pieces, he told his art dealer, Larry Gagosian, that he would need a hundred one-kilo bars of pure gold. The gallery looked into renting the gold—for two previous exhibitions of the piece, in museums, it had come on loan from banks—but in the end Gagosian decided to buy it, for around three million dollars, from Stanford Coins & Bullion, in Houston. The gallery wired the money in early February, and, for security reasons, requested that shipment be delayed until just



Chris Burden

before the opening. Two weeks later, R. Allen Stanford, the cricket-loving financier who owns the bullion company, was charged by the S.E.C. with an alleged eight-billion-dollar fraud, and all of Stanford's assets were placed in receivership by court order. There is no word yet on when or if Gagosian will get his gold.

The show, "One Ton One Kilo," was scheduled to open at the Beverly Hills branch of Gagosian on the first Saturday in March. That morning, there was a sign taped to the gallery's door: party cancelled, show indefinitely postponed. Burden was inside: a compact, thickset man in his early sixties, wearing a no-nonsense blue button-down, and looking a little stunned. He paced around the base of a 1964 Ford farm truck painted the color of grocery-store pumpkin pie, on which was mounted a crane holding a two-thousand-pound block of cast iron: "One Ton." (Burden lives in Topanga Canyon, and maintains a fleet that includes a fire truck, a forklift, a brush-chipper, and a bulldozer; the Ford was one of his own.) Even he, the master of the high-art gag, was having a hard time coming to terms with what had just happened. "This is such a simple trade," he said. "I have six goats and you have two gold coins. It's five thousand years ago, and I say, 'Can we make a deal?' It's the most traditional, conservative transaction. That it can go wrong is kind of shocking."

Burden climbed a short flight of stairs to a second-floor gallery. In the center of the room stood a glass vitrine on a black pedestal, like the aftermath of a magic trick. The gold was to have been arranged inside, in the form of a low ziggurat, and illuminated with a spotlight. (The room would have been dark.) "The empty case, waiting!" he said, shaking his head.

The idea of working with gold bars first occurred to Burden in the seventies, during another prolonged economic downturn. Back then, he envisaged a sculpture consisting of four gold bars, watched over by a security guard. "I figured most people would think I was putting the guard there to make them *think* it was real when it was fake," he said. "The point was to make people think you were faking when it was actually real gold." Commodities fraud, in reverse.

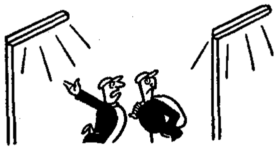
One of the things that fascinated Burden about gold was its fluctuating value. Case in point: not long after Gagosian struck his deal with Stanford, investors, panicked by the falling stock market, made a so-called "flight to safety," driving up the price of gold. "I got a call from a curator friend, who ran into Larry," Burden said. "He said, 'Larry loves you! He just made two to three hundred thousand dollars on the gold he bought you.' " (In the weeks since Gagosian had placed the order, the price of gold had risen about ten per cent.) The volatility made pricing the sculpture risky. The gallery settled on five million dollars, but, Burden said, "I told them, 'You should be very careful. If during the exhibition the price of gold doubles, you'll be selling six million dollars' worth of gold for five million dollars. I'll sign up to buy that right away.' "

Burden gazed at the case. "I don't know," he said. "Is it going to be here next week, or the week after, or never?" He mentioned that the golden ziggurat would be surrounded by tiny figures made from paper matches, which he called "a symbol of the transience of human life versus the lasting power of gold." They were being stored in a balsa-wood cake box, which he opened. Some were dancing; others saluted or stood guard with straight-pin swords drawn. One was on its knees, cardboard hands clutching a red match-tip head. Burden held it up. "Mamma mia, right?" he said. "We should put this one in the case."

—*Dana Goodyear*

INFRASTRUCTURE DEPT.

LIGHT FIGHT



The lighting designer Howard Brandston is one of the profession's leading practitioners. In his career, he estimates, he has "maybe been responsible for more sockets being installed than anyone else"; locally, his commissions include the New York State Supreme Court, the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, the Meadowlands, Battery Park, and Barneys' women's store. When he lit the dinosaur wing of the American Museum of Natural History, he used low lights to appeal to kids, "running through the bones like electric mice." For the Statue of Liberty, he had General Electric manufacture a special arc tube to mimic the morning sky. The other evening, Brandston led a walking tour of the midtown street lights, to protest the city's lighting policy. Dressed in a plaid coat and a trapper hat, he stood under the clock tower in Herald Square holding a small spectrometer toward a stream of light that emanated from a cobra-head lamppost. "Look through the bullet end," he said. "With this sort of metal-halide bulb, you get almost the complete spectrum. Sodium vapor is so disadvantaged it's almost hard to imagine."

Sodium-vapor—or high-pressure sodium—lighting was Brandston's bad guy, what he calls "the lamp of least choice." He and the Municipal Art Society, under whose aegis he was conducting the tour, object to the color of the light—unlike whitish metal halide, high-pressure sodium burns yellow-orange. "There is this negative subliminal response," Brandston said. "The connotation, mainly, is crime." This month, the M.A.S. launched a campaign against the sodium lights. In a press release, Vanessa Gruen, from the M.A.S., asserted, "Yellow light muddies the colors of the surrounding neighborhoods and causes trees to look brown. It makes people feel less secure, because the colors around them are not true." Asked for comment, Seth Solomonow, a Department of Transportation spokesman, said that high-pressure sodium lights are durable and cost-efficient, and have been the city's default lights for thirty years.

In Brandston's view, an overreliance on instruments, instead of instincts, mars contemporary urban lighting plans, which should be determined not by how technically bright an area is but by how well someone standing in it can actually see. "We have, over time, overlighted everything in America," he told the tour group. Cities, he said, should be thought of as rooms without ceilings. "When I was doing the lighting for the Roosevelt Memorial, I said, 'We don't need any more light,' " he recalled. "The city went nuts. 'What, no light?' We went down to Roosevelt Island, and, just from the skylight from your overlit city, we could read the New York *Times* to ninety-seven per cent." Listening to Brandston, an obscure shaper of the city, talk about things like "dark-sky zealots" was cool and kind of spooky, like meeting whatever person decreed that taxis should be yellow. He took a reading with a light meter that he wore on a lanyard around his neck: two foot-candles. "Anything over two is a waste of money," he said.

Before proceeding north on Broadway, Brandston pointed out a high-pressure sodium light on Thirty-fifth Street. Its effect was as noir as it was yellow, as though the aim were not to draw people in but to keep them out, maybe from a stockyard. "If makeup rooms had high-pressure sodium lighting, you would end up looking like the Bride of Frankenstein," Brandston said, at one point.

Passing through the gaudy blue aura of a hotel lobby ("It's fun") and by a gift-shop stall with a naked bulb dangling from a wire ("If you've got the spectrometer, look at the incandescent light here!"), Brandston stopped on Thirty-seventh Street: .2 foot-candles. He was fine with that. He led the group down the block and stopped under a high-pressure sodium fixture. "Look at your skin tone," he said. "The government tried designing an energy-efficient medical facility, and the doctors had to take the patients outside in the middle of winter to evaluate their skin color." A volunteer held up what was supposed to be a cherry-red square of cardboard. It looked orange. Brandston said, "I happen to like trees green." Foot-candles: fifteen.

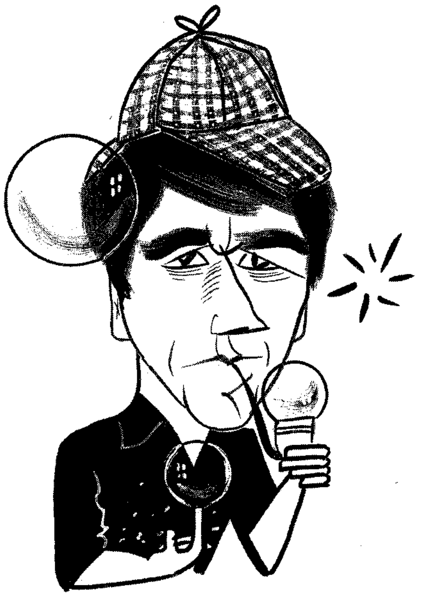
The tour ended in Bryant Park (.1 foot-candle), which Brandston had lit in the late nineteen-eighties. He was trying to say that he had designed the scheme to provide "just a gentle wash of light on all these buildings here, so that they don't get lost," but it was hard to hear him over a car horn, the high-pressure sodium light of sounds.

—*Lauren Collins*

THE BOARDS
TINY BUBBLES

Criminal acts on Broadway are usually confined to the stage (see "Chicago" or "West Side Story") or the box office (ticket purchasers can feel like victims of highway robbery). What recently befell Fan Yang, the creator of "Gazillion Bubble Show," an Off Off Broadway production, may signal an unsettling new frontier.

Several months ago, when Yang, who calls himself "the world's greatest bubble artist," was in Tokyo preparing a new version of his production, he got a call from a member of his staff in New York, where his show had been running for two years, at the New World Stages Theatre. Someone had broken into the storage unit in North Bergen, New Jersey, where Yang kept his supplies; three tons of his secret bubble solution and six thousand special bubble toys had been stolen. After doing some quick calculations, Yang realized that he had enough bubbles left for only six weeks' worth of shows. "My first words were 'Guys, this is serious stuff,' " he recalled the other day.



Fan Yang

"Gazillion Bubble Show" was an improbable hit when it opened for an intended nine-day run, in 2006. It involves Yang, his wife, Ana, or his brother, Jano, blowing bubbles, some the size of beach balls, some filled with smoke, others with baby bubbles tucked inside. Lasers are involved. Near the end, there is a bubble blizzard. Yang, a native of Vietnam who perfected his craft while living on the streets of Europe, has set ten Guinness World Records. Last year, he encased an elephant in a bubble. For twenty dollars, audience members can have their pictures taken inside a bubble, with the caption "Me in a Bubble."

Flying back to New York, Yang focussed on two goals: keep the show running and solve the crime. The bubble solution is concocted from six types of concentrate that Yang designs and manufactures ("to create varying viscosities and densities," he said). To produce more, he would have to travel to Hong Kong, where he has a processing plant, buy the ingredients, mix them into the dozen solutions used in the show, submit them to an international safety inspection, ship them to Los Angeles, and drive them to Manhattan. That would take months. The show would close. Meanwhile, Yang was hoping that the North Bergen Police Department would crack the case and recover his bubbles.

"It's very fishy," Yang said, sitting in his dressing room at the theatre. A show had just ended, and a crew was mopping bubbles off the stage. He went on, "You need a tractor-trailer to move all the things they took. And to get inside you need a code." He pointed out that no other units in the facility were damaged. "Honestly, who steals bubble solution?"

By the time the North Bergen police got around to looking into the theft, Yang says, the storage facility had erased its surveillance tapes for the night in question. (The company denies the charge.) "That case is cold," Lieutenant Frank Cannella said, adding that his team has been keeping an eye on local flea markets. Yang managed to keep the show running, though, mainly by adding water to whatever chemicals he could dig up locally. (There were, he admitted, fewer bubble snowflakes in the bubble-blizzard finale.)

Yang's publicist, Joe Trentacosta, suggested that the culprit might be a rival bubbleologist. Yang dismissed the idea. "If somebody performs with my solution, I will know immediately," he said. Besides, the solution doesn't require stealing: Gazillion Bubbles, sixty-four ounces, $11.99 at Kmart.

After travelling to Hong Kong four times in three months, Yang was finally able to replenish his bubble stock. And although he says the incident has cost him two hundred and fifty thousand dollars (an insurance policy paid him a few thousand), he doesn't blame the police. "They have millions of more important things to do," he said. "I think the case of the bubble solution is something on the side for them." Trentacosta has given up on the idea of recovering the stolen solution. "I don't think we'll find the stuff," he said, "unless we see a big-ass bubble on the side of the street."

—*Mike Peed*

SWANN

THE BEGINNING OF THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD;
AS IT IS WRITTEN IN THE PROPHETS,
Behold, I send my messenger before thy face,
Which shall prepare thy way before thee.
The voice of one crying in the wilderness,
Prepare ye the way of the Lord,
Make his paths straight.

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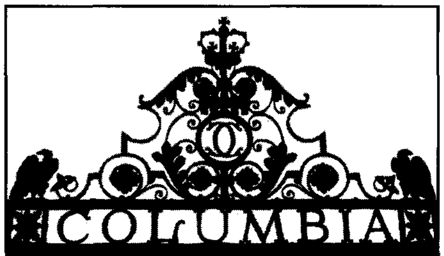

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ANNALS OF FINANCE

MADOFF AND HIS MODELS

Where are the snow jobs of yesteryear?

BY RON CHERNOW

In financial history, Ponzi schemes—the fraudulent enterprise of paying off old investors with money collected from new ones—are the most peculiar of crimes. Before they are detected, they seem exquisitely pleasing to perpetrators and victims alike. The fraud appears to be a bountiful gift that the confidence trickster, a generous soul and a financial wizard to boot, has bestowed upon a grateful world. Investors frequently revere the schemer, endowing him with magical properties. The schemer, in turn, may come to believe that his scheme isn't altogether shady and that he will someday generate the sensational returns advertised. For the duration of a Ponzi scheme, it may seem like a victimless crime. Not surprisingly, when the impostor is exposed, the victims experience profound hurt and disillusionment, having trusted implicitly in the schemer against a chorus of naysayers.

Charles Ponzi was probably the most colorful and outlandish practitioner of the scheme that bears his name. An Italian immigrant and postman's son who arrived in Boston in 1903, he had charm, imagination, and chutzpah of epic proportions. At first, he worked as a grocery clerk and dishwasher, but he soon got a job with a bank in Montreal that paid exorbitant interest rates and stole money from depositors—invaluable training for his future exploits. After being arrested for forging a signature on a check, Ponzi was clapped into a Quebec jail for twenty months and told his unsuspecting mother that he had landed a job as a "special assistant" to the warden. Returning to the United States, he served a two-year stint in an Atlanta prison for smuggling Italian immigrants into the country.

Ponzi's mind was a small factory for cranking out get-rich-quick schemes. Back in Boston in 1919, Ponzi had the epiphany that secured his place in the annals of financial larceny. An avid stamp collector, he received a letter from Spain that contained a voucher called an International Reply Coupon, which the recipient could redeem for a return-postage stamp at a fixed price in sixty-three countries. Many European currencies had slumped after the war, and Ponzi reasoned that he could buy such coupons, say, in debased Italian lire, redeem them in America, then sell the stamps at a sizable profit. It was an elementary form of currency arbitrage—exploiting discrepancies in the prices of the coupons in different currencies. In December of 1919, Ponzi launched a firm called the Securities Exchange Company—it preceded by more than a decade the creation of the Securities and Exchange Commission in Washington, D.C., established to police swindlers like Ponzi—and wooed investors by promising a fifty-per-cent return on their money in forty-five days.

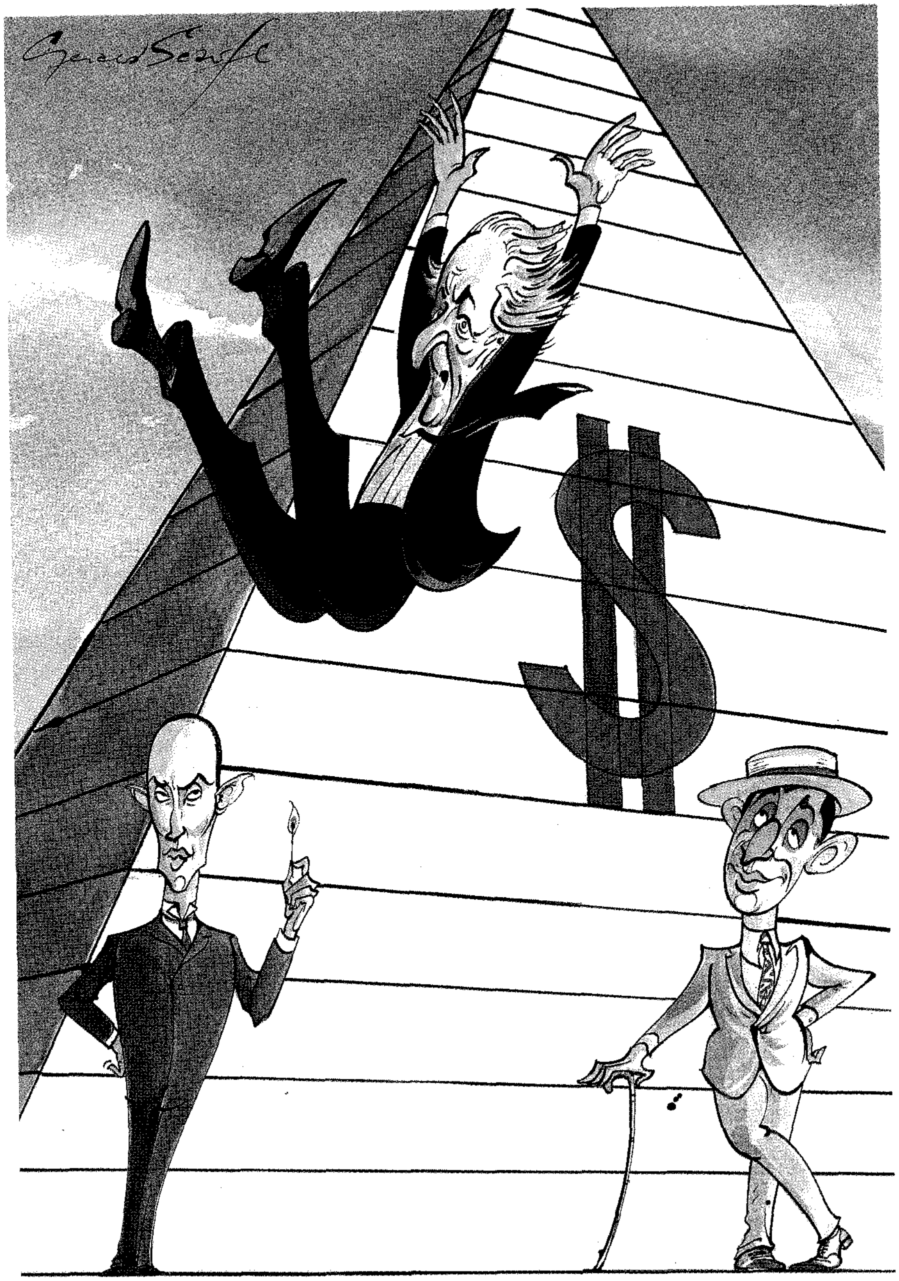
Financial fraud is the crime of choice for arrivistes, insecure dreamers with a yearning eye for high society. Desperate to feel rich and important, they tend to be excellent mimics of respectability. The diminutive Ponzi fit the bill perfectly. A dandy in a straw boater with spats and a showy gold-tipped cane, he strutted about Boston, greeting reporters with ready quips and quotable lines, and his press coverage was, at first, highly laudatory.

Like many confidence men, Ponzi preyed first on his own kind, and the Boston Italian community embraced him with delirious joy. As insurance against future trouble, Ponzi also recruited Boston policemen and reporters as investors. In February, 1920, he collected a meagre five thousand dollars; five months later, he was raking in a million dollars weekly. Ponzi's business drew in thousands of investors, bewitched by his supposed prowess. With considerable skill, he portrayed himself as a populist champion who would enable small investors to earn their rightful places in the world. He claimed to accept money from investors as a form of altruism, and they rewarded him with fanatic loyalty.

Ponzi's investment strategy wasn't illegal, and the postal coupons could, in theory, have yielded a profit. In practice, however, the scheme was preposterous and unworkable. Nobody could buy and transport stamps in sufficient quantities to earn the returns that Ponzi promised. In "Ponzi's Scheme" (2005), Mitchell Zuckoff, a journalism professor at Boston University, regards his subject as a chronic dreamer with a cockeyed scheme that went awry. Ponzi was indeed a strange amalgam of petty visionary and big-time crook. Soon after he announced his scheme, postal authorities in Italy, France, and Romania suspended the sale of postal coupons, destroying any chance that Ponzi could implement his plan or reward investors with outsize returns. When anyone pressed him about his investment methods, he hinted that he couldn't reveal his lucrative strategies.

As he paid off old clients with money from new ones, the press scented criminal mischief afoot. The New York Postmaster, Thomas G. Patten, pointed out that too few coupons existed to sustain a scheme of such magnitude. When reporters dredged up Ponzi's criminal past in Montreal, complete with mug shots, his fate was sealed. Eight months after he founded the Securities Exchange Company, federal agents padlocked the offices. It turned out that Ponzi had never actually got around to buying many postal coupons and that it was all a colossal hoax. Sentenced to five years in a federal prison in Plymouth, Massachusetts, Ponzi had fancy stationery printed up that said "Charles Ponzi, Plymouth, Mass." He was deported to Italy in 1934, and later made his way to South America, where he died in the charity ward of a Rio de Janeiro hospital in 1949.

Ponzi was convinced that he was a wizard who had stumbled upon a form of financial alchemy that had eluded others. Incapable of moral clarity, he could never quite admit to himself that he was a charlatan and that his scheme was an impossible fiasco. He fooled others because he fooled himself. Right up until the end, he found refuge in fantasies that he might take over a chain of banks or shipping lines that would enable him to pay off his legions of worshipful investors. He never suffered serious remorse or second thoughts.



Ivar Kreuger and Charles Ponzi turned dreams of avarice into a business plan.

GERALD SCARFE

Ponzi's scheme has enjoyed a rich afterlife, often in far more adept hands. As one ponders the scandal of Bernard L. Madoff, who has pleaded guilty to fraud in a scheme thought to have cost nearly sixty-five billion dollars in investor money, one is tempted to say that Ponzi lacked ambition. Madoff imitated Ponzi in a few particulars, such as victimizing his own community (in his case, Jewish) and inventing fictitious returns, but his improvements on the traditional Ponzi scheme are breathtaking.

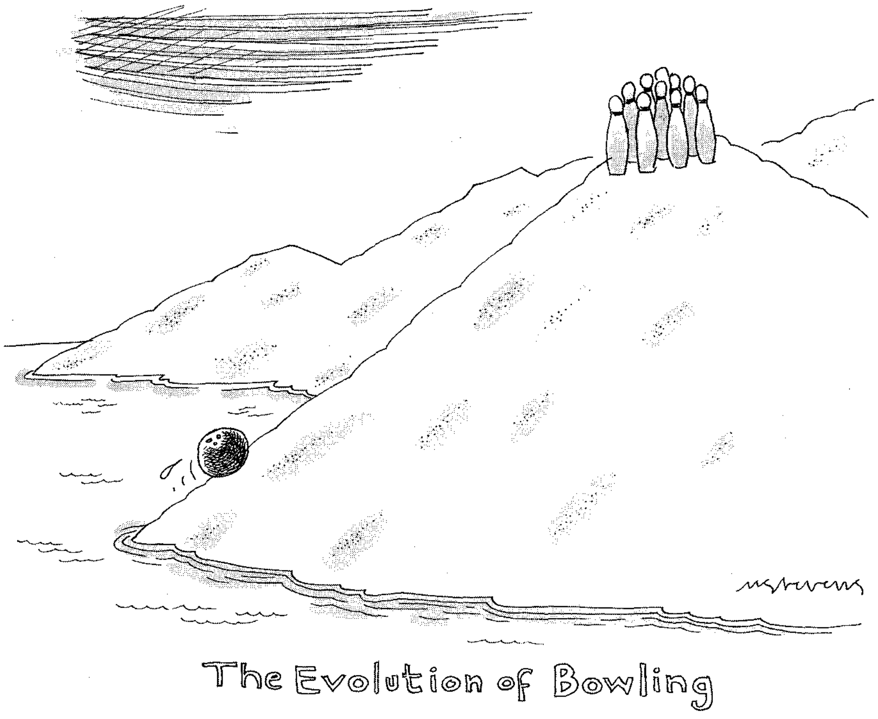
Where Ponzi pandered to uneducated investors and promised gargantuan returns, Madoff trimmed annual returns to a modest but wondrously reliable eight to twelve per cent. Madoff's seductive appeal lay not so much in his purported profits as in his consistency. Although that consistency was far more suspect than his returns, given the volatility of financial markets, the reasonable-sounding profits gave his operation an air of respectability. Wealthy investors could flatter themselves that, far from being greedy, they were sacrificing yield for security. Madoff's method enabled him to swindle rich people who prided themselves on their financial conservatism and sophistication, enabling him to appeal to avarice of a quiet, upper-crust sort.

Forever dependent on a growing supply of fresh victims, Ponzi schemers can't be fussy about their clients and are typically in an unseemly hurry to snare them. Here, Madoff made his most audacious innovation. Instead of openly courting investors, he pretended to fend them off. Back in the nineteen-twenties, sophisticated investors joined together in pools that manipulated individual stocks, and such funds acquired a certain cachet. Something similar happened in recent years with hedge funds, which retained snob appeal even when returns flagged. Madoff made it seem impossibly difficult to invest with him. As a rule, his fund was closed to new investors, requiring special introductions to the club. "I know Bernie, I can get you in" was the open sesame whispered throughout the world of Jewish society, where "Uncle Bernie" was affectionately touted as "the Jewish bond." The aura of exclusivity was bogus, of course: he ended up with almost five thousand client accounts.

Even when he deigned to accept people's money, Madoff emphasized his extreme reluctance. "Bernie would tell me, 'Let them start small, and if they're happy the first year or two, they can put in more,'" one investor told the *Wall Street Journal*. Madoff pretended that his investment-advisory business was merely a lucrative sideline for select friends, while his real business lay in a market-making operation that matched buyers and sellers. Thus Madoff posed as a man beleaguered by his own generosity, who took on new clients as a favor to friends. It was a bravura performance.

As word spread that Madoff made heaps of money for investors, he acquired a social glow at the country clubs where he recruited his victims, burnished by his mansion in the Hamptons, his villa on the French Riviera, and yachts moored in various places. Dressed in charcoal-gray bespoke suits from Savile Row and fond of expensive watches, he took on the protective coloration of his environment—a specialty of Ponzi schemers—and both admired and resented the moneyed crowd that he emulated. Only his facial twitches and the ghost of an old stammer gave the lie to his calm, avuncular image. His low-profile approach appealed to a class of investors who would have cringed at Ponzi's crass hucksterism.

Although he came from modest origins in the outer boroughs of New York—he earned the seed money for Bernard L. Madoff Investment Securities from working as a lifeguard at Rockaway Beach and installing sprinkler systems—Madoff clothed himself in establishment credentials. He was a trustee of Hofstra University, a nonexecutive chairman of the Nasdaq stock exchange, and a member of a government advisory panel on securities regulation. Like Ponzi, he posed as a paladin of small investors, and he ingratiated himself with government regulators. Every large Ponzi scheme needs an active network of agents—carnival barkers who pull people into the big tent—and Madoff strategically deployed people in places such as Greenwich, Connecticut, and Palm Beach, Florida. His mystique led prominent personalities—including Steven Spielberg, Mortimer Zuckerman, Senator Frank Lautenberg, Elie Wiesel, Sandy Koufax, and Kevin Bacon—to invest with Madoff directly or through charities they established.



The Evolution of Bowling

Madoff's spectacular downfall has sparked a cottage industry of journalists trying to fathom his psychopathology. The enigmatic smirk he has shown to the news media, giving the impression of a man savoring a little joke on the world, has only heightened curiosity. In late January, the *Times* business section ran a piece that typed Madoff as a psychopath and quoted forensic psychologists who likened him to Ted Bundy, the serial killer: "They say that whereas Mr. Bundy murdered people, Mr. Madoff murdered wallets, bank accounts and people's sense of financial trust and security." These analysts assumed that Madoff intended from the outset to create a gigantic fraud and destroy thousands of people. Did he?

Although Madoff's scheme dates back to at least the early nineteen-nineties, we understand little about the genesis of his criminal operation. Still, a new biography of another grand-scale Ponzi schemer, to be published next month, allows for some educated guesses. "The Match King," by Frank Partnoy, a law professor at the University of San Diego, is an engrossing study of Ivar Kreuger, a Swedish financier of the nineteen-twenties and the operator of a global safety-match business so enormous that he was dubbed the Match King. Although his empire started only a few years after Ponzi's scheme imploded, Partnoy calculates that Kreuger's machinations lasted ten times longer and involved sums fifty times larger. He lifted the prosaic Ponzi fraud to a new level of sophistication and engaged in corporate finagling on a dizzying scale.

Kreuger didn't merely fabricate returns. He was a genuine businessman, backed by factories, mines, and other tangible assets. Like other industrialists, Kreuger planned to amass a huge fortune by manufacturing something ubiquitous and banal, much as John D. Rockefeller had done with kerosene. Kreuger wanted to monopolize the sale of the tiny boxes of safety matches that people used to light stoves or tobacco; cigarette smoking had become faddish among women as well as men in the nineteen-twenties, stoking demand for the product. By the 1929 crash, Kreuger's Swedish Match Company, a subsidiary of his holding company, Kreuger & Toll, had cornered the market on two-thirds of the forty billion matchboxes sold worldwide each year. Kreuger & Toll also earned a reputation as a proficient builder that completed construction projects reliably and on time. John Maynard Keynes extolled Kreuger as "perhaps the greatest constructive business intelligence of his age."

As a young man, Kreuger had rebelled against the monotony of his father's job as a factory manager in a small family match business on the Baltic Sea. The young man hatched grandiose plans as he studied engineering. Like Madoff, Kreuger was somewhat colorless and unassuming. He wore tastefully tailored suits, spoke five languages fluently, and projected an air of stability. He seldom laughed, was ascetic in his eating habits, and, aside from occasional flings with young women, was obsessed by business. A consummate actor who followed a scripted life, he always prepared a face to meet the faces that he met. Partnoy opens his story with Kreuger taking a transatlantic liner in the early nineteen-twenties and staging vignettes to impress other passengers. He undertook detailed preparations for meetings, then made sure specific questions were asked so that he could rattle off the string of facts he had memorized. He punctuated his speeches with meaningful pauses and long stares at the audience. Secretive and aloof, Kreuger, like Madoff, built his mystique by playing hard to get and retreating into a tight little zone of privacy.

Kreuger scarcely merits attention as a personality, although he had charm enough to court another great Swedish enigma, Greta Garbo. As a financial manipulator, however, Kreuger deserves study. In 1922, Swedish Match offered a dividend equal to twelve per cent of its share price, which Kreuger & Toll topped with a dividend worth twenty-five per cent. Kreuger believed that he could produce such lofty returns on a regular basis. Both his fame and his subsequent undoing came about because he was held hostage to those unrealistically high guarantees.

The alluring dividends dulled the critical faculties of investors, who didn't pry too closely into his affairs. With Europe devastated after the First World War, the only place where Kreuger could raise the vast capital to bankroll his empire was Wall Street. "You haggle about giving me money," Kreuger chided a Swedish banker. "But when I get off the boat in New York I find men on the pier begging me to take money off their hands." In 1923, Kreuger set up a new firm called International Match to act as a conduit for that money. American investors gave Kreuger a rapturous reception: by the time the Great Depression struck, his stocks and bonds ranked as the most widely held securities on Wall Street.

The American connection was all-important to Kreuger because of a daring plan he had concocted to take over the world match industry. He would approach governments with an irresistible deal: he'd lend them money at single-digit interest rates if, in exchange, they granted him domestic monopolies on matchbox production. Kreuger always hoped that his interest payments to Wall Street would be equalled by the interest on the money he was lending abroad, giving him the matchbox monopolies for free. But things never quite worked out that way, and he finally had to borrow at much higher interest rates on Wall Street than he received from foreign governments. By late 1927, Kreuger had parlayed his scheme into match monopolies in nearly a dozen countries. The whole operation was premised on an uninterrupted flow of capital from Wall Street, which hinged, in turn, on dangling those hefty returns before investors.

As he doled out stupendous dividends, Kreuger developed a loyal following among American investors, who profited handsomely from his securities. Before the New Deal, there were few disclosure requirements for securities. In the nineteen-twenties, fewer than a third of the firms listed on the New York Stock Exchange even bothered to publish quarterly reports. So it's not surprising that satisfied investors swallowed Kreuger's brief, cryptic statements. With the federal government gripped by a laissez-faire ideology, the states tried to compensate with so-called "blue sky" laws, which regulated the sale of securities to discourage fraud, but they were inadequate to the cunning of a transnational swindler such as Kreuger.

Like Ponzi, Kreuger didn't set out to create a fraudulent enterprise. Nor was he booking only phantom profits. Rather, he aroused exaggerated expectations that he couldn't live up to. Annual returns in the match industry fluctuated wildly, denying Kreuger the steady high earnings he needed. So he turned to the venerable robbing-Peter-to-pay-Paul racket. To pay his dividends, he took out secret loans, imagining that they were temporary, only to have the deception take on a permanent life of its own. Financial engineering had, instead of acting as the servant of his business, evolved into its very essence.

Ivar Kreuger's empire previews the multinational corporations of the nineteen-sixties which regarded themselves as sovereign states and aimed to soar above the regulatory snares of any single country. Like Harold Geneen, of I.T.T., and other conglomerate chieftains of that era, Kreuger thought that all businesses could be reduced to ledgers studied in the antiseptic atmosphere of a corporate suite. By the late nineteen-twenties, his Swedish Match division alone employed twenty-six thousand people in ninety match plants scattered across the globe. Tellingly, Partnoy's biography doesn't contain a single scene of Kreuger inspecting a factory, chatting with a floor manager or worker, or strolling through one of the forests from which his matchsticks were chopped. Nor, as far as we know, did his bankers or accountants evince the least

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"How long are you going to be her yoga mat?"

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bit of curiosity about seeing these places. Kreuger's haunts were banks, boardrooms, and government ministries. He was always shopping for tax havens and pliant governments, such as the Duchy of Liechtenstein—"droll little countries with droll little laws," he called them. By striking deals with politicians, he was able to negotiate monopolies that he could never have attained in the marketplace. And countries desperate for Kreuger's loans enabled him to charge their citizens artificially high prices for matches.

Kreuger was a virtuoso at financial shell games, shuffling assets from one subsidiary to another to produce the desired results. He converted corporate balance sheets from transparent tools to instruments of deceit. His maze of companies was so baffling that secret subsidiaries spawned other secret subsidiaries in a never-ending chain of concealment. Anticipating the murky world of Enron and A.I.G., Kreuger pioneered off-balance-sheet entities, shunting debt to invisible firms and dummy companies. At times, it seemed as if Ivar Kreuger alone understood the corporate behemoth he had created, and he showed how easily legitimate companies, with a little creative accounting, can turn into outlaw enterprises.

Those who wonder how Madoff duped his auditors will find an instructive case study in Partnoy's account of Kreuger's relationship with A. D. Berning, a junior auditor with Ernst & Ernst, the accounting firm that earned lucrative fees from representing Kreuger's business interests. The young functionary prided himself on handling the mogul's account, and was pathetically eager to please him. Berning wasn't disposed to question shocking discrepancies that surfaced in the ledgers, especially after the Kreuger account led to his making partner. The Match King softened him up with perks and presents, inviting him along on fancy trips that stroked the auditor's ego. Berning gradually became complicit in the fraud without ever quite realizing that he had strayed across the line. Later, he achieved heroic stature by his part in exposing the fraud that he had helped to perpetuate. Kreuger's American bankers, the Boston Brahmin house of Lee, Higginson & Company, were no less credulous toward their foremost underwriting client. Every time the firm got too nosy, Kreuger boosted the fees he paid it. Like Madoff, Kreuger presented himself as a public benefactor, but Kreuger did so on a global scale, since he was ostensibly helping to rescue the French and German economies and advising President Herbert Hoover.

As Kreuger slipped deeper into debt and deceit, his personality became impenetrable. In his tightly guarded world, his motto was "Silence, silence, and more silence." For days on end, he sequestered himself in his Stockholm headquarters and warded off unwanted visitors. Outside his boardroom he posted red and green lights to signal to his secretary whether visitors could enter. In his office, he had a dummy phone that rang whenever he stepped on a secret button under his desk; he would then cite urgent business to chase away guests who had overstayed their welcome. At times, he pretended to field calls from Mussolini or Stalin. At one point, he even hired Swedish actors to attend a reception and pose as ambassadors from various countries.

The inner sanctum that Kreuger created and the way he dodged spontaneous encounters presage aspects of how Madoff did business. Madoff operated his investment-advisory business on the seventeenth floor of the Lipstick Building, in midtown Manhattan, in offices that have been described as "icily cold modern." Even though he supposedly managed billions of dollars, he concentrated the operation in a small space, run by a handful of longtime associates and family members, who thus far haven't been charged with any wrongdoing. For a time, his wife, Ruth, supervised the firm's bank accounts. Madoff fostered a subtle climate of fear among investors. He grew testy when quizzed about his methods and forbade investors from discussing their conversations with him. When one client dared to do just that in an e-mail to other clients, Madoff threatened to banish the man from his fund. A tacit understanding arose that Madoff wouldn't discuss financial matters in social settings, preventing confrontations with inquisitive investors or encounters that might surprise him into unwanted revelations. Most of all, Madoff protected himself by being plain elusive. "You couldn't meet Madoff," one banker told the *Wall Street Journal*. "He was like a pop star."

In the classic account "The Great Crash," John Kenneth Galbraith notes that booms always mask many cases of embezzlement, which come to light during the bust. "Within a few days" of the

1929 crash, Galbraith writes, "something close to universal trust turned into something akin to universal suspicion." Such a climate was bound to undermine Ivar Kreuger, who appeared on the cover of *Time* the week of the crash, perhaps confirming the old journalistic adage that any phenomenon appearing on the cover of *Time* has already peaked. Kreuger's entire career had been predicated on access to American money markets. When they shut down, he couldn't survive long. In 1931, to lay to rest any doubts about his solvency, Kreuger actually boosted the International Match dividend from three dollars and twenty cents to four dollars per share, a promise that only worsened his predicament.

Kreuger had previously skirted the rules but, technically speaking, didn't engage in outright fraud. Only after the crash did he stoop to old-fashioned criminal behavior. He forged a series of Italian treasury bills, misspelling the name of an Italian finance official. However adroit in financial larceny, he was an amateur in more rudimentary forms of crime. Kreuger let it be known that he hoped to revive his sinking fortune by cutting a deal with Mussolini's government, and hinted at other secret deals in the works. Meanwhile, he shifted assets frantically from one account to another to hide an over-all shortage of funds, a shortage on the order of a hundred million dollars.

As rumors spread about his troubles, Kreuger became increasingly reclusive, avoiding meetings with bankers and auditors. He drank and smoked heavily and barricaded himself in a room in Stockholm that he had labelled the Silence Room. By early 1932, the gates of the New York credit markets had slammed shut for Ivar Kreuger. As he foresaw ruin, he grew manic, greeting his bankers on one occasion in yellow silk pajamas and a purple silk dressing gown. As the self-control of this skillful actor crumbled, he started to babble in sudden outbursts and heard imaginary phones ringing and people knocking at the door.

In March, 1932, at the age of fifty-two, Ivar Kreuger left his Paris apartment and bought a 9-mm. Browning pistol. As a dozen bankers awaited an important meeting with him, he retired to his bedroom, lay in bed, and shot himself in the heart. His suicide note began, "I have made such a mess of things that I believe this to be the most satisfactory solution for everybody concerned." Two weeks later, accountants at Price Waterhouse declared his companies insolvent. He left behind widespread destruction. The venerable house of Lee, Higginson went bankrupt, and one partner had the decency to admit, "I suddenly knew we had all been idiots." Unlike the Madoff scandal, Kreuger's downfall didn't leave investors completely bereft. Swedish Match retained a major portion of the world match market, and Kreuger also left behind substantial gold, timber, iron-ore, and real-estate interests. The trustees of International Match recovered a third of lost investor value after thirteen years—about the same amount that Ponzi's investors eventually recovered.

Frank Partnoy, as a fair-minded biographer, renders a mixed verdict on Ivar Kreuger. "He was not merely the greatest financial fraudster of the century," he writes. "He was a builder, as well as a destroyer." Certainly, Kreuger, like all great Ponzi schemers, had a willing army of dupes and confederates behind him; as is often the case, the victims were so gullible that they seem like eager accomplices to, as well as casualties of, the fraud. And, no less than Ponzi, Kreuger had also deceived himself.

Few financiers become embroiled in Ponzi schemes voluntarily, for the simple reason that such schemes are mathematically certain to fail. At some point, the incoming money cannot keep pace with the outgoing claims, and the fraud must unravel. And so the saga of Ivar Kreuger presents a credible explanation of how giant Ponzi enterprises come about: not as sudden inspirations of criminal masterminds but as the gradual culmination of small moral compromises made by financiers who aren't quite as ingenious as they think. As Charles Baudelaire once said, we descend into hell by tiny steps. Indeed, in pleading guilty last Thursday, Madoff explained that he had initially thought his fraud would be short-lived. He may well have fancied himself a brilliant money manager. Perhaps, early on, he even had a few good, legitimate years. When his lucky streak suddenly ended, he might have thought that he would temporarily make whole the losses of old investors by giving them money from new ones. And then he was off and running. ♦

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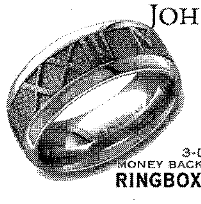

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THE POLITICAL SCENE

THE REPLACEMENT

The rise of Roland Burris.

BY JEFFREY TOOBIN

Roland Burris still occupies temporary office space in the Dirksen Senate Office Building, in a suite far from the floor of the United States Senate, so when the buzzer signalling an imminent vote interrupted his lunch the other day, he put down his plastic soupspoon, left his sandwich untouched, and hustled out into the marble hallway. "I'm not missing any votes," he said. "They'll get on me for that, too."

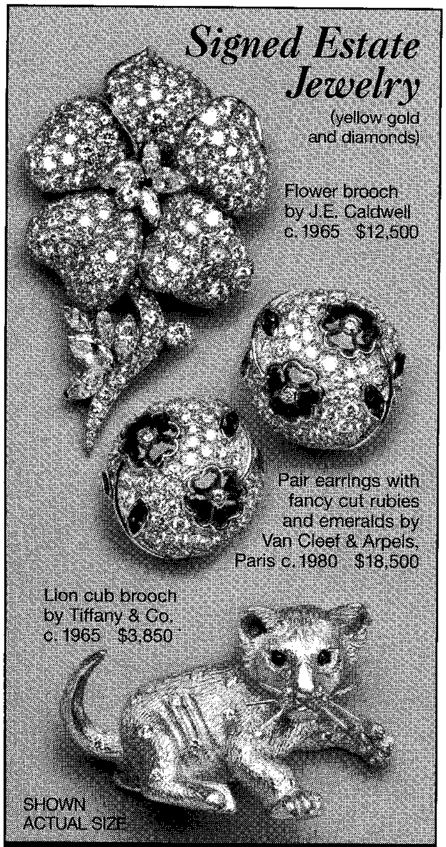
Burris, the junior senator from Illinois, is trim and fit for a man of seventy-one, with a full head of hair barely flecked with gray. He beckoned a young aide to keep up as he bounded toward an elevator reserved for senators. There, Burris was joined by two Democratic colleagues, first Maria Cantwell, of Washington state, then Blanche Lincoln, of Arkansas. Burris had been a senator for less than two months—he was appointed by Rod Blagojevich, then the governor of Illinois, on December 30th, to fill the unexpired term of Barack Obama—and he had yet to learn the names of all of his colleagues. "Hello, Senator!" Burris said cheerfully to each woman. They nodded, smiled back at him, and, looking slightly embarrassed, stared down at the floor.

In the basement of the building, Burris raced to catch the subway to the Capitol, and when he arrived he met Ron Wyden, of Oregon, and Bernie Sanders, of Vermont, who, having already voted, were heading in the opposite direction. "Senators!" Burris said, and the two men made the same gestures as the pair in the elevator had: a friendly nod followed by an averted gaze. Burris darted into one of the tiny elevators that take senators up to the Senate floor, and Tom Coburn, the Oklahoma Republican, wrapped an arm around his shoulder, squeezing so hard that the men's heads were practically touching. "Hang in there, my buddy!" Coburn said.

Few senators in history have made a more ignominious national début than Roland Burris. Blagojevich appointed Burris, a former Illinois comptroller and attorney general, just three weeks after the Governor had been arrested and taken from his home in handcuffs. Blagojevich was charged with crimes relating to his alleged attempts to exploit his office for personal and political gain, including trying to sell Obama's Senate seat. (Blagojevich maintains he did nothing wrong.) The entire Democratic caucus in the Senate, as well as the President-elect, asked Burris to refuse the appointment, and Blagojevich was impeached and removed from office a few days later. Burris ignored the entreaties, assumed the office, and plunged almost immediately into another scandal.

In a succession of raucous public appearances, Burris gave contradictory, perhaps even self-incriminating, explanations of the circumstances leading to his appointment. (He has both denied and admitted discussing the Senate seat with Blagojevich's advisers in advance of his selection.) In short order, editorials in the Chicago *Tribune* and *Sun-Times* called for Burris's resignation, a demand echoed by the new governor of Illinois, Pat Quinn, and by Dick Durbin, the state's senior senator. "As far as my colleagues here in the Senate, they are grasping as I am to try to get to the truth of this situation," Durbin said after failing to persuade Burris to quit. "They are confused and concerned about the disclosures that have been made." An Illinois prosecutor is investigating Burris for possible perjury and related crimes, and the matter is also before the Senate Ethics Committee.

During his long career in Illinois politics, Burris has encountered many of the state's most influential figures, some of them principled risk-takers and some corrupt rogues. And it's been clear that Burris belongs to neither category. He is a conventional politician, one guided far more by cautious self-interest than by ideological passion. His self-regard may be greater than that of some of his peers; he is



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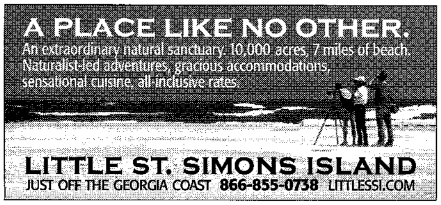

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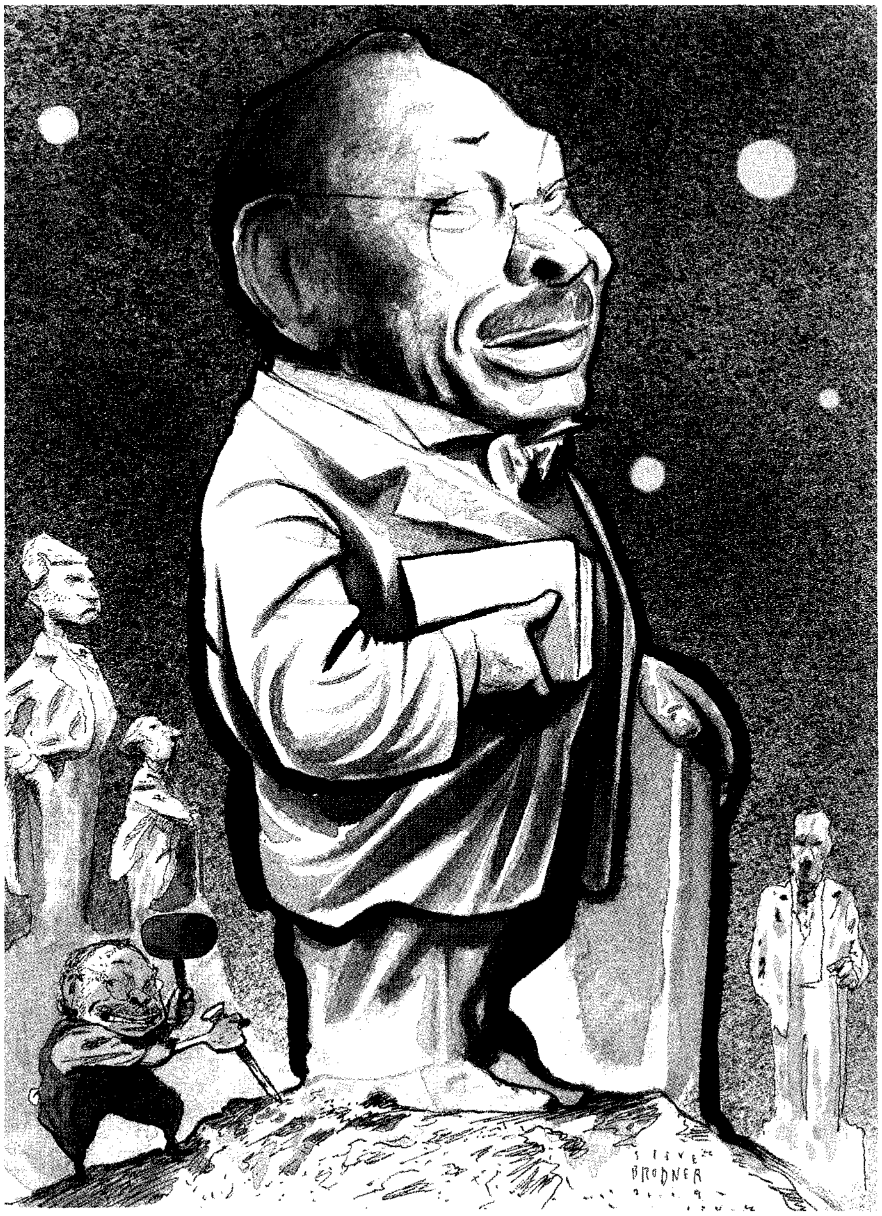
especially known for the words of self-celebration carved into the wall of a mausoleum that is waiting for him in a Chicago cemetery. (The structure bears the inscription "Trail Blazer" and lists such accomplishments as being the first African-American undergraduate at Southern Illinois University to be an exchange student at the University of Hamburg, in Germany.) "He was a figure of fun, because he was highly egocentric," Alan Dobry, a former Democratic ward committeeman in Chicago, said of Burris's years as a local politician. "When he was in office, he had two aides who went around with him, and they were generally referred to as the 'Ro-laids.'" According to the Harvard sociologist William Julius Wilson, a longtime student of Chicago politics, Burris "was a soldier, part of the machine. He's not a distinguished politician. He's not a powerful political thinker." Of course, this description hardly distinguishes Burris from many of his colleagues on Capitol Hill. In his very ordinariness, Burris may represent a triumph of sorts for the civil-rights movement, which was, at least in part, a struggle for black people to be seen as just like everybody else.

Roland Burris's paternal grandfather was born in Tennessee, but around the turn of the last century he moved to Centralia, a small city two hundred and seventy miles south of Chicago, in the heartland of Illinois. Even then, Chicago represented the center of African-American life in the state, but Centralia was a major outpost for the Illinois Central Railroad, which drew black migrants from the South. When Burris was born, in 1937, the city had about thirteen thousand people, including about two thousand blacks.

Centralia is roughly on the same latitude as Louisville, and, even after the Second World War, Southern ways prevailed. In 1951 and 1952, the local N.A.A.C.P. tried and failed to integrate the public swimming pool, and the following year the city's African-Americans decided to try again. This time, Burris's father, who worked for the Illinois Central and served as the vice-president of the local branch of the N.A.A.C.P., travelled to East St. Louis to hire a lawyer to push the integration effort; the elder Burris laid out a hundred dollars as a retainer, a considerable sum at the time, given that he was making around forty cents an hour. Roland, who was fifteen, was chosen to test the ban with a group of his friends over Memorial Day weekend. "We headed out to the pool; we bought our ticket," Burris told me, as we sat in his Senate office. "They sold us a ticket, because there was all this build-up before. They knew we were coming. You could see the whites lined up all outside, and here are these five little black kids with two chaperones. And they had to line up on the outside as well. And we went in; we showered; went out; swam in the pool. No incident. No issue."

For the Burris family, though, the successful effort had an unhappy postscript. The lawyer, an African-American, never showed up in Centralia and disappeared with the retainer. "If we, as a race of people, are going to get anywhere in this society, we've got to have lawyers and elected officials who are responsible and responsive—that's what my dad said, and it resonated with me," Burris told me. "I was never in any serious trouble, but I'd beat up on people. I was a tough little kid. And I changed my whole attitude. Went back to high school my junior year. I took one of my brother's suits that he had left home from college, got one of my dad's white shirts, 'cause I didn't have a tie, and I went to school my junior year dressed up. I made myself two goals. One, I want to be a lawyer. Number two, I want to be a statewide elected official of Illinois."

Not everyone might have drawn these



Burris is a conventional politician, guided principally by cautious self-interest.

STEVE BRODNER

particular lessons from the events at the Centralia pool, but Burris has hewed with remarkable precision to his teen-age ambitions. He attended Southern Illinois University and, during his year in Hamburg, lived in a dormitory with students from thirty countries. "And, of course, I was elected president of the dormitory," Burris told me. "After meeting all the other people, you recognize the leadership skills. That's when I really knew." He obtained a law degree from Howard University, in Washington, D.C., then moved to Chicago, where he worked as a bank examiner, travelling around the Midwest, evaluating the soundness of small financial institutions. Around this time, Burris married, and he and his wife, Berlean—now a retired university administrator—moved to Chatham, a middle-class black neighborhood on the South Side. With the first of his goals behind him, Burris set to work on the second: his political career.

Jesse Jackson, who is four years younger than Burris, also moved to Chicago in the early sixties. Jackson had recently graduated from North Carolina A. & T. State University, where, as a civil-rights activist leading lunch-counter sit-ins, he earned the attention of the state's governor, Terry Sanford. Jackson planned to attend seminary in Chicago, but he also needed a job, so Sanford wrote a letter of introduction for him to the city's mayor, Richard J. Daley. Daley offered Jackson a job as a toll collector (which Jackson declined), and invited him to join the Democratic organization on the South Side. "He sent me out to Fifth Ward, which is a ward that is heavily black," Jackson told me recently. "The constituency there was blacks who worked for the organization."

Daley was at the peak of his power as the boss of the city's Democratic machine. The key to his control of Cook County was his ability to give or withhold jobs—from street-cleaner to member of Congress. Those who supported Daley's Democratic organization with their votes and labor were rewarded; those who did not were punished. "There was so much fear," Jackson told me, as we sat in the converted Chicago synagogue that has been his base of operations for forty years. "Every city official was in the machine. And so if you wanted to be a policeman or a fireman or a principal, you had to be blessed by the machine. If ministers challenged that machine in their pulpits on Sunday, you had building inspectors at the church on Monday, to check out the church—fire escapes, all that stuff."

On the South Side, and in other neighborhoods with large African-American populations, Daley contracted much of his patronage operation to what was known as the "submachine," a group of compliant black politicians, led by Congressman William Dawson. Even though Dawson made sure that blacks received a share of government jobs, Jackson and others in the nascent civil-rights movement noted that the submachine had no interest in challenging Daley on broader issues, like fair housing and school integration. When Jackson started attending Democratic Party meetings, he said, "I began to raise certain questions."

So, in 1967, did a young Harvard Law School graduate and Korean War veteran named William Cousins, Jr. "I was an independent Democrat," Cousins told me. "I was never affiliated with the regular Democratic organization, which we call the machine." Even though Cousins's neighborhood on the South Side was largely African-American, there were no blacks in positions of political leadership. Cousins decided to run for alderman—the Chicago term for a member of the City Council. "I asked Roland if he would serve as my campaign chairman, even though he had never before been actively involved in politics," Cousins said. "But he had served on a neighborhood conservation committee, to see that repairs were being made on our infrastructure, and I was impressed with him." At the time, the district included much of Chatham, the neighborhood where Burris still lives, in a home once owned by the gospel singer Mahalia Jackson.

In those days, Burris displayed the energy and enterprise that are indispensable for a political career. By 1967, the year Cousins ran for alderman, Burris had become the first black vice-president at Continental Illinois National Bank, in Chicago. "I was very active in all types of community groups," he told me. "Like the Avalon Park Community Council. That's where I met Bill Cousins. We were trying to fight City Hall about the broken curbs, the potholes, and the torn-up sidewalks. And so I did a report, about every pothole in that section, every broken curb in that section, all bad sidewalks." City Hall responded. "Within six or seven months, they began to repair those broken streets and sidewalks and curbs," Burris said. "And that kind of impressed Cousins." With Burris's help, Cousins won his race for alderman. (Cousins went on to become a widely admired Illinois judge.)

In 1968, emboldened by Cousins's success, Burris decided to run for state representative, but lost to a machine-backed candidate. Four years later, an executive with Montgomery Ward named Dan Walker mounted an independent Democratic bid for governor of Illinois, and Burris signed on to help. Walker won a surprise victory, and Burris joined his staff as a director of Central Management Services, a major administrative job. When Walker ran for reëlection, in 1976, Burris decided to run for comptroller, a statewide post. But Mayor Daley, who despised Walker, put together a slate of candidates to run against the Governor and his team, and Walker and Burris were swamped in the 1976 primaries. (Walker later went to prison for his role in a savings-and-loan scam that took place after his term as governor.)

Jesse Jackson hired Burris as the executive director of his civil-rights organization, then known as Operation PUSH. "As this black thing kept growing, a guy like Burris ends up on the ticket as a civil but nonthreatening guy," Jackson told me. "He was a black in Dan Walker's cabinet. And when it was over, he didn't have a job. Other campaign members had jobs and consultancies and this and that. And so our board hired Roland. One, because he was competent. Two, because, for our own movement credibility, to have a guy like Roland as the chief operating officer in some sense made it easier to get support." Burris worked for Jackson for less than a year. "It didn't last very long, because he moved on to his political work," Jackson said. "He served us well, and it was a kind of mutually beneficial deal. There was nothing acrimonious about it. And Burris knows how to talk to white people and black people. He is not seen as a marcher, a protester, one who will scale walls."

Because of a quirk in the law, the result of a change to the state constitution, the comptroller job became open again just two years later, in 1978, when the incumbent decided to run for a different post. This election was a turning point for Bur-

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ris. He had given up banking for politics, yet he had never won a race. "I talk to my wife, and I say, 'You know, honey, I want to try to go for comptroller,'" he recalled. "And she was saying, 'No, you lost,' and this other stuff. My wife looked at me one day and said, 'I'll tell you what. The only way that I can support you running for comptroller again is that you run with the Party's endorsement.' That threw down the gauntlet." Burris met with Eugene Sawyer, a Daley stalwart and an African-American, who later served briefly as Chicago's mayor.

"We'd see each other on occasion, and we'd chat, and Gene said, 'You oughta think about joining us.' And so I said, 'No, I'm going to keep my independent stripe,'" Burris recalled. But after the conversation with his wife, Burris went to Sawyer with a different message. "I walked into Gene Sawyer's office in July of 1977," Burris said. "Made an appointment with him, walked in. 'Yeah, Roland, what do you want?' 'Well, Alderman'—he was alderman then, Sixth Ward—'I'd like to join your organization. What do you do?' 'You're in!' 'What does it cost me?' And he says nothing. And he looks at me and says, 'What do you want to do?' I said, 'Well, I want to run for state comptroller.' Gene Sawyer looked at me and said"—Burris rapped his knuckles on the table—"'Fine! Let's do it, Roland.' Just like that! He says, 'I'd always wanted you to come on around.'"

MOM AS FLY

A fly with a human head
heads for your screen. It's Mom,
toting groceries and laundry

way too tiny. An interruption in scoring.
But first score a bill worth
the trouble. *Mom! A twenty?*

The fly mounts the monitor
and notes the debt to education
remains unpaid.

But past midnight theorems
are not her thing. Way faux,
as in eternal, those problems.

She hand-rubs. You crush her,
forgetting anguish might lead to food.
No buzz to you equals a fast connection,

where all relationships worship
the math, holy Pythagorean. But you
don't have the millions of eyes

she had to watch over something.
What was that something?
Your hand drifts to a pimple.

Could it be?
Dad decks you bad,
the triangle so over.

—*Terese Svoboda*

The Daley machine chose its slate of candidates at meetings of the state central committee of the Democratic Party. Daley's supporters dominated the proceedings, but now and then a few reformers also won election as committeemen and so were allowed to attend, if not influence, the slating meetings. Alan Dobry, who was a veteran of Chicago reform politics, attended the state committee meeting in 1977. "Roland was trying to get put up for Illinois comptroller," Dobry recalled. "When he got up and spoke to the central committee, the first thing they said to him was 'You started out as Bill Cousins's campaign manager, what about that?' But Roland assured everyone that he wasn't an independent like Bill Cousins anymore, and was now a faithful member of the machine. Then they asked where does his committeeman stand on this? Gene Sawyer got up and said, 'Roland is not an independent; he is a faithful member of the Sixth Ward Democratic Party organization.'" (One of the first people Burris hired to his staff as a U.S. senator was Sawyer's nephew.)

And so, with the machine's help, Burris realized the second of his career ambitions, by winning the statewide race for comptroller in 1978. The job has few major responsibilities, aside from auditing various branches of state government, and Burris began planning a run for higher office. He lost a Democratic primary for the Senate to Paul Simon in 1984 and served three terms as comptroller, until 1991. When the state's attorney general ran for governor in 1990, Burris got the Democratic nomination for attorney general, again with machine support. He won the election, and critics saw his pact with the machine as a sign that he had put his ambition ahead of his values. "He would do what he was told, and stay out of trouble," Dobry said. "Nobody took him seriously. Every time he got one of these state jobs, he took care of the machine in his patronage. The machine always liked having one of their own as attorney general." According to Bernard Stone, a longtime Chicago alderman, Burris is "a very personable guy, and he never had the reputation of having his hand out. He was always a go-along guy. When he's run with Party backing, he's won; when he ran against the Party, he lost. It's as simple as that."

Burris did institute several reforms as attorney general. "He started a women's-advocacy division, the first one in an attorney general's office, using government resources to promote gender equality," Diane Rosenfeld, who was a top aide to Burris at the time and now teaches at Harvard Law School, told me. "We focussed on violence against women, and trained state's attorneys on prosecuting these cases." Burris also made efforts to tighten environmental laws, though he was generally stymied by the Republican-dominated legislature in Springfield. Certainly the job allowed Burris to indulge his temperamental aversion to controversy, except on the one occasion when controversy found him.

On February 25, 1983, Jeanine Nicarico, a ten-year-old who lived with her family in the Chicago suburb of Naperville, stayed home from school because she was sick. When her older sisters came home that afternoon, Jeanine was gone. Two days later, after a widely publicized search, her body was found in a gully not far from her home. She had been raped and beaten to death. In 1985, after an investigation led by the DuPage County state's attorney's office, Rolando Cruz and Alejandro Hernandez, young men who lived in a neighboring town and had minor criminal records, were tried and convicted of Jeanine's murder, and sentenced to be executed.

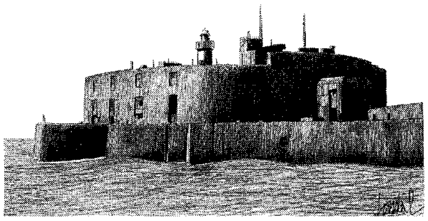
The attorney general of Illinois is required by law to represent the government in all appeals of death sentences. The Nicarico case already had a tangled legal history by the time Burris took it over. Despite great public pressure on authorities to solve the murder, there had been no arrests for more than a year. Eventually, though, Cruz and Hernandez were charged; the case against them was based largely on vague but incriminating statements made by Hernandez. In 1988, the Illinois Supreme Court reversed their convictions, on the ground that they should have been tried separately. Cruz was tried again in 1990 and again convicted and sentenced to death. The appeal reached Burris's office in 1991. (A second trial of Hernandez ended in a hung jury; a third ended in a conviction and an eighty-year prison sentence.)

Burris had been on the job for less than a year, but it was an open secret that he planned soon to run for governor. Democrats, especially African-Americans, are often challenged to prove their tough-on-crime bona fides to voters, and the Cruz appeal offered Burris a chance to make his mark in a high-profile case.

The assignment to write the government's brief went to a young prosecutor, Mary Brigid Kenney. "It was a famous case," the lawyer, now Mary Brigid Hayes, told me. "I went through the record, taking everything in the defendant's brief with a grain of salt, but I saw the trial was just replete with errors. I reached the conclusion that I could not in good conscience argue that any error was harmless and this man should be executed." Two years after Jeanine Nicarico was murdered, a man named Brian Dugan had been arrested and had pleaded guilty to killing a child in a town near Naperville. In the course of negotiations to avoid the death penalty, Dugan confessed to other crimes, including Nicarico's murder. During Cruz's second trial, his lawyers had been allowed to mention Dugan's confession to the jury, but the trial judge prohibited the defense from putting forward much other evidence that Dugan might be the actual killer. "Most of the evidence that corroborated Brian Dugan's confession did not get to the jury," Hayes said.

In a memorandum to Burris on February 14, 1992, Hayes wrote, "After thorough examination of the record, I have concluded that I cannot, in good conscience, ask the Illinois Supreme Court to affirm the conviction." She was convinced that Dugan was the murderer and that Burris's office should "confess error"—the legal term used by a prosecutor to acknowledge a miscarriage of justice. Hayes didn't hear back from Burris, but she tried, unsuccessfully, to persuade his top aides of her position. Finally, on March 5, 1992, Hayes resigned. "My ethical responsibilities as an officer of the court compel me to take this action because I cannot sit idly as this Office continues to pursue the unjust prosecution and execution of Rolando Cruz," she wrote to Burris, concluding, "I too, beg of you, General Burris, please begin mitigating the damages of this ugly prosecution. Do not help execute an innocent man."

Hayes's letter was leaked to the media, and Burris called a press conference to respond to her charges. "A jury has found this individual guilty and given him the death penalty," Burris said at the time. "It is my role to see that it is upheld. That's my job." Burris's subordinates continued to press for Cruz's execution. As Thomas Frisbie and Randy Garrett recount in "Victims of Justice Revisited," their 2005 book about the murder, the new prosecutor assigned by Burris to the case concluded his oral argument to the Illinois Supreme Court with the words, "Set a date certain for the execution of Rolando Cruz." The court voted four to three to affirm the conviction and the death sentence.



Cruz's lawyers, led by Lawrence Marshall, then a law professor at Northwestern University, continued to fight the execution. In 1995, DNA tests excluded Cruz as a source of semen found on Nicarico's body and implicated Dugan. After a third trial and eleven years in prison, most of them on death row, Cruz was released, as was Hernandez. (Later this year, Dugan will stand trial for Nicarico's murder.) In 2000, Governor George Ryan declared a moratorium on executions in Illinois, and three years later, just before leaving office, he commuted the sentences of all inmates on death row to life in prison or less, and pardoned Cruz. Ryan has cited the Cruz case as a major factor in changing his thinking about the death penalty. (Ryan is now in federal prison, after being convicted of crimes that took place when he was Illinois's secretary of state, before his term as governor.)

Burris offered no apology for seeking to execute an innocent man, but faulted Mary Brigid Hayes for her behavior. "She was given the authority by the appellate officer to work up the brief for appeal to uphold the jury conviction," Burris told me. "And then she reads this brief, evidently, and says this person is innocent. Well, that's not for a lawyer to decide." He went on, "She was overridden by my staff people, because I wasn't even in this. And they filed the brief, and she got upset and said that she couldn't talk to me and resigned. So that's the gist of the story. That's it."

In 1994, Burris began his run for governor as the favorite for the Democratic nomination. Burris and Richard Phelan, one of the two other candidates, both laid claim to support from the Chicago machine, but by this time its power was much reduced, especially in statewide races. The third contender, Dawn Clark Netsch, came from behind to win, but she, in turn, was routed in the general election against the Republican incumbent, Jim Edgar.

Within months of losing the primary, Burris, determined to return to office, began running for mayor of Chicago as an Independent. The incumbent, Richard M. Daley, defeated him, sixty per cent to thirty-six per cent. Burris opened a law and lobbying practice, working with his son, Roland, Jr.—he also has a daughter, Rolanda, a university administrator—but he continued to pursue elected office. In 1998, he ran for governor again and received thirty per cent of the vote in the Democratic primary. Four years later, Burris ran for governor a third time, finishing third in the primary, behind the eventual winner of the general election, Rod Blagojevich.

There were no hard feelings between the two men. "Roland was the attorney general when I was a brand-new state legislator," Blagojevich told me when he visited New York recently. "I sat on the Judiciary Committee in the House, and he testified in front of us a few times. He seemed like a very nice man, honorable guy. He spoke German. That impressed me." To anyone who had followed Burris's career, it was not surprising that once Obama appeared likely to win the 2008 Presidential race, Burris would declare his interest in filling out Obama's Senate term.

At the heart of the current controversy around Burris is what he did to persuade Blagojevich to appoint him to Obama's seat. (Burris declined to discuss this subject.) Blagojevich told me that he thought of the selection process as having occurred in two phases—before and after his arrest, on December 9, 2008. "He was not in the first tier of options that I was considering in Round One," Blagojevich said. Based on the information in the federal complaint against the Governor, it seems that the likely leading candidates in Round One included Jesse Jackson, Jr., the Illinois congressman; and Valerie Jarrett, a close adviser to Obama. But Blagojevich's arrest radically altered the political calculus surrounding the appointment.

At a press conference on December 9th, Patrick Fitzgerald, the U.S. attorney who brought the case against Blagojevich, implied that he arrested the Governor to stop him from appointing someone to the Senate seat. "Governor Blagojevich has been arrested in the middle of what we can only describe as a political-corruption crime spree," Fitzgerald said. "We acted to stop that crime spree." In a remark captured by a government bug, Blagojevich had said to an adviser, of Obama's seat, "I've got this thing and it's fucking golden, and, uh, uh, I'm just not giving it up for fuckin' nothing."

After Blagojevich's arrest, it was widely assumed that even though he was still governor, he would not have the nerve to make an appointment to the Senate, and, in any event, such thinking went, no one would accept the job from such a tarnished figure. Perhaps Blagojevich wanted to mock the political establishment, or hoped to ingratiate himself with a diverse jury pool. He has said that he made the appointment simply to insure that Illinois was represented by two senators, and he told me, "There was a preference for an African-American for this seat." Clearly, the universe of possible candidates shrank dramatically after December 9th. But Blagojevich's arrest proved to be Burris's big chance. The Governor sent one of his criminal-defense attorneys—an unusual emissary—to ask Burris, who had not figured prominently in his earlier considerations, whether he was interested.

The conversation occurred on Sunday, December 28, 2008. "The lawyer told me that Roland had asked that I call him directly and make the offer," Blagojevich told me. "I was watching the Cowboys and Eagles fighting for the last playoff spot. I called him at four o'clock to offer the seat." Burris accepted. Every Democrat in the Senate signed a letter asking Burris to refuse the appointment.

Blagojevich introduced Burris as the new senator at a news conference on December 30th. The main drama of that occasion was supplied by Bobby Rush, a veteran Illinois congressman and former Black Panther, who stepped to the podium to support Burris. Rush asked the reporters not to "hang or lynch" the man who would now be the only African-American in the Senate. Rush's invocation of race stilled the ardor of Senate Democrats hoping to fight Burris's appointment. "My colleague from Illinois, Congressman Bobby Rush, made strong statements along those lines," Senator Dick Durbin said. "They were painful and hurtful, and it became part of this calculation."

Illinois legislators still wanted to question Burris about his appointment, and he was called to Springfield to provide sworn testimony on January 8th. The main issue in the hearing was whether Burris had made a deal with Blagojevich to win the appointment. In the key exchange of the day, State Representative Jim Durkin asked Burris, "Did you speak to anybody who was on the Governor's staff prior to the Governor's arrest, or anybody—any of those individuals or anybody who is closely related to the Governor?" Burris answered, "I recall having a meeting with Lon Monk about my partner and I trying to get continued business, and I did bring it up—it must have been in September or maybe it was in July of '08—that, you know, you're close to the Governor, let him know that I am certainly interested in the seat." (Monk is a former chief of staff to Blagojevich.)

Soon it emerged that Burris had submitted an affidavit to the legislature stating that "there was not any contact between myself or any of my representatives with Governor Blagojevich or any of his representatives regarding my appointment to the United States Senate." This appeared to contradict his acknowledgment of contact with Monk, and at a press conference in mid-February Burris revealed that he had filed another affidavit stating that in October he had been asked by Rob Blagojevich, the Governor's brother, to help raise money for the Governor. During that conversation, Burris stated, he had inquired about the possible selection of a successor to Obama. (He explained that he had filed the affidavit voluntarily, after realizing that his testimony was incomplete.) Worst of all, Burris subsequently admitted that he had tried, unsuccessfully, to help raise funds for the Governor while he was seeking the appointment. (His second affidavit notes a later conversation with Rob Blagojevich in which Burris said that he could not raise money for the Governor, because it could be seen as an attempt to influence the selection.) During his appearance at Chicago's City Club, on February 18th, one questioner asked Burris, "Was it wrong of you to solicit funds for Rod

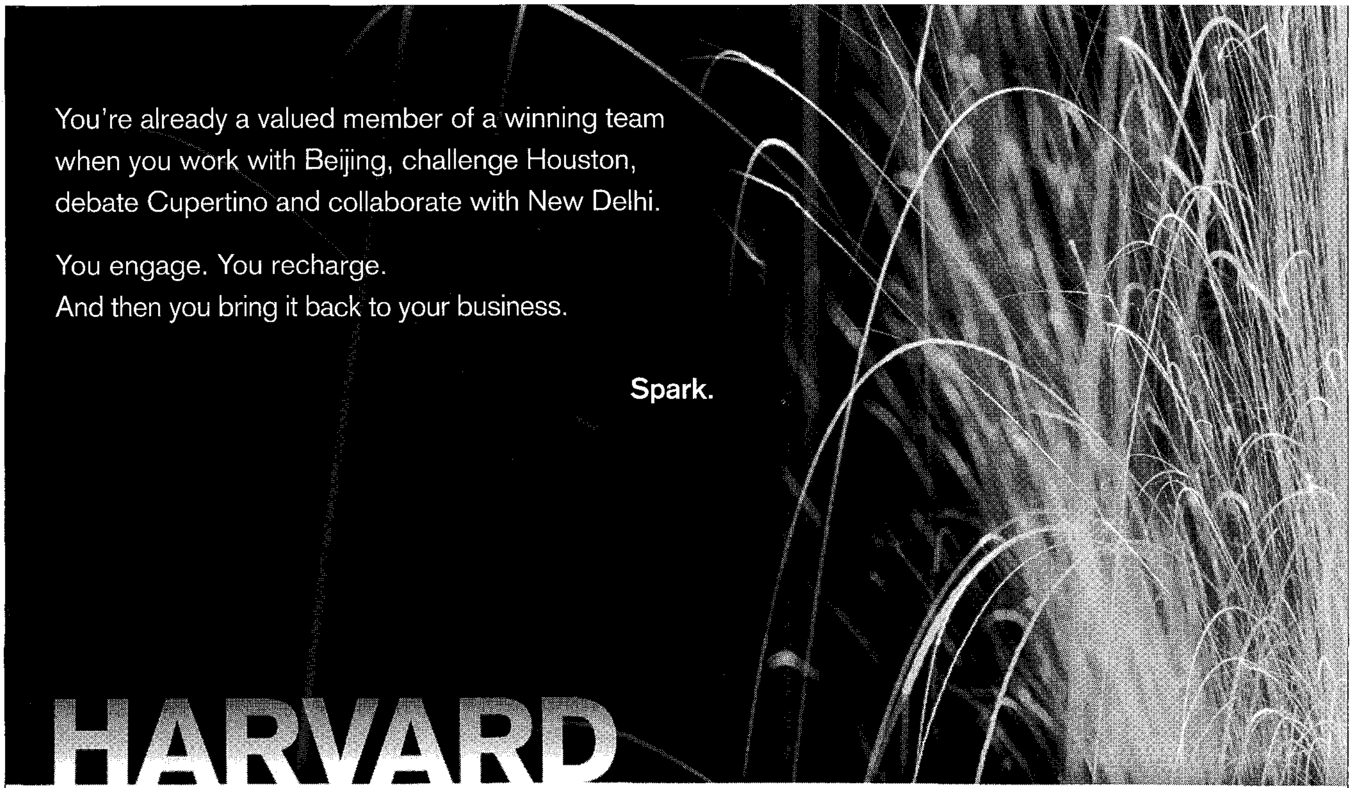
Blagojevich at the same time he was considering you for the Senate?” Burris answered, “I was never considered for the Senate,” an assertion that was met with murmurs of incredulity.

Throughout February, ongoing revelations of apparent contradictions in Burris's story prompted calls for him to resign. Burris responded with typical displays of his stolid good nature. “I'm from Centralia, you all know me, O.K.?” he said at the City Club. “You all know Roland Burris. But I have a history with you, a record that I have built over a lifetime. Thirty years in public life and never a hint of scandal.” Burris does not appear to be in great jeopardy of criminal prosecution. His answers may have been misleading, but not clearly false. (For example, he implied but did not state under oath that Lon Monk was the only person closely related to the Governor with whom he talked about the Senate appointment.) In any event, given the current economic environment, the Senate has more pressing matters to address than Burris's fate. In recent weeks, a consensus seems to be forming that Burris will serve out Obama's term, but will not run for another in 2010. Burris probably couldn't win anyway, and he has now attained the goal that appears to mean most to him—adding United States senator to his list of achievements.

One of the responsibilities of the Illinois state comptroller is to regulate cemeteries. During Burris's tenure in the job, he helped pass a law regarding so-called “pre-need,” a practice that allows advance purchasers of burial plots to pay for their final resting places in multiple installments. At his law practice, Burris helped clients prepare wills and plan for burials. “I'm an estate planner,” he told me. “So I'm up here telling people you should do pre-need, right? Well, how could I tell you to take care of your estate and I don't have mine together? So, we then start shopping, the wife and I, for how we're going to do this. And we came across Oak Woods Cemetery”—one of Chicago's oldest burial grounds, located on the South Side.

Burris chose a design that is unlike any of the other hundred or so mausoleums on Oak Woods's hundred and eighty-three acres. The structure is built of Barre granite, includes two columns and three tablets, and towers over the modest marker on the grave of Jesse Owens, which is a few steps away, next to the Lake of Memories. One hundred and fourteen words are carved into the stone, listing Burris's accomplishments, several of them obscure. It notes that he was the first non-accountant to serve on the board of directors of the Illinois C.P.A. Society, and that he was the first African-American on the board of trustees of the Financial Accounting Foundation. There is room to add his service in the Senate.

Burris told me that it was the cemetery's managers who persuaded him to build the mausoleum. “It was their insistence,” he said. “ ‘Because this is not so much for you, Roland.’ And I didn't even think about people thinking about my ego. This is for young people who can see a person who had accomplishments.” ♦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LETTER FROM MOSCOW

THE ACCUSED

A murder outraged the anti-Kremlin opposition. The murder trial divided it.

BY KEITH GESSEN

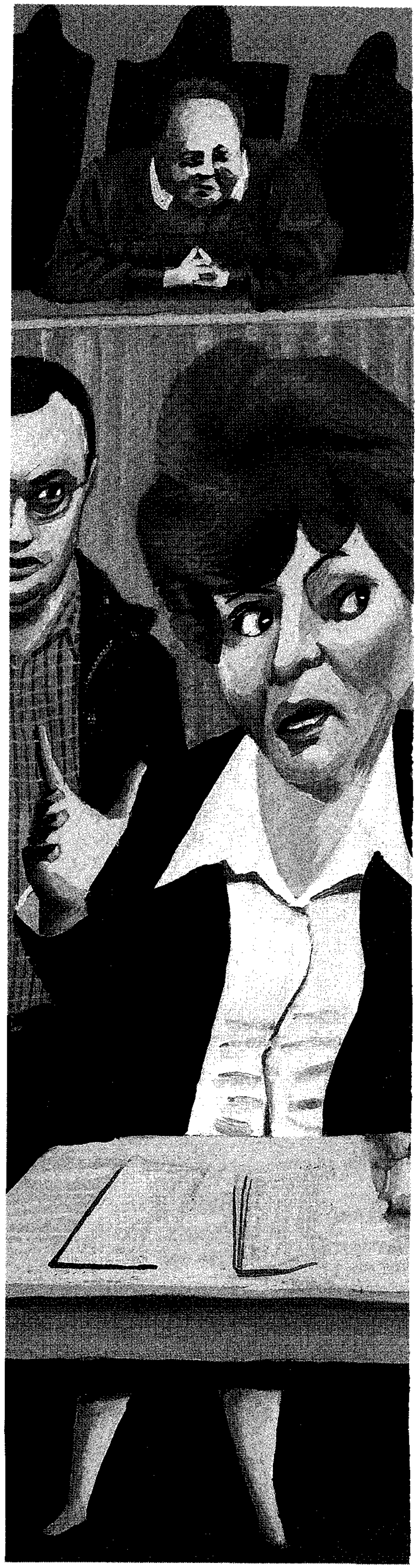
The first day I tried to attend the trial of the men accused of organizing and abetting the murder of the journalist Anna Politkovskaya, my papers weren't in order and I didn't get in. I walked across the street to a Starbucks and for the rest of the day read a tall stack of printouts I'd made about the case from the Web site of *Novaya Gazeta*, Politkovskaya's old paper. While I sat there, a young human-rights lawyer was shot in the back of the head right outside the subway stop I'd got out of that morning. He was accompanied by a twenty-five-year-old *Novaya Gazeta* freelancer. The assassin shot and killed her, too, before ducking into the subway and getting away. The next day, I was allowed into the trial.

Anna Politkovskaya was murdered as she came home with some groceries on a Saturday afternoon, October 7, 2006, Vladimir Putin's birthday. The killer waited inside her entryway and shot her when she got into the elevator. He shot her three times from outside the elevator, and then, when she fell from the impact, stepped into the elevator and shot her two more times. Politkovskaya was forty-eight years old, and very thin. In photographs, as a younger woman, she is attractive but plain; in middle age, with her dark features and short, gray hair, she had become striking. On the day of the murder, she wore black pants and a black vest. At the trial, the prosecutors handed around the bullets recovered from her body and showed a large color photograph of Politkovskaya crumpled on the elevator floor, blood seeping from the wounds in her head, the murder weapon with its long black silencer next to her right hand, which still clutched a plastic bag full of groceries.

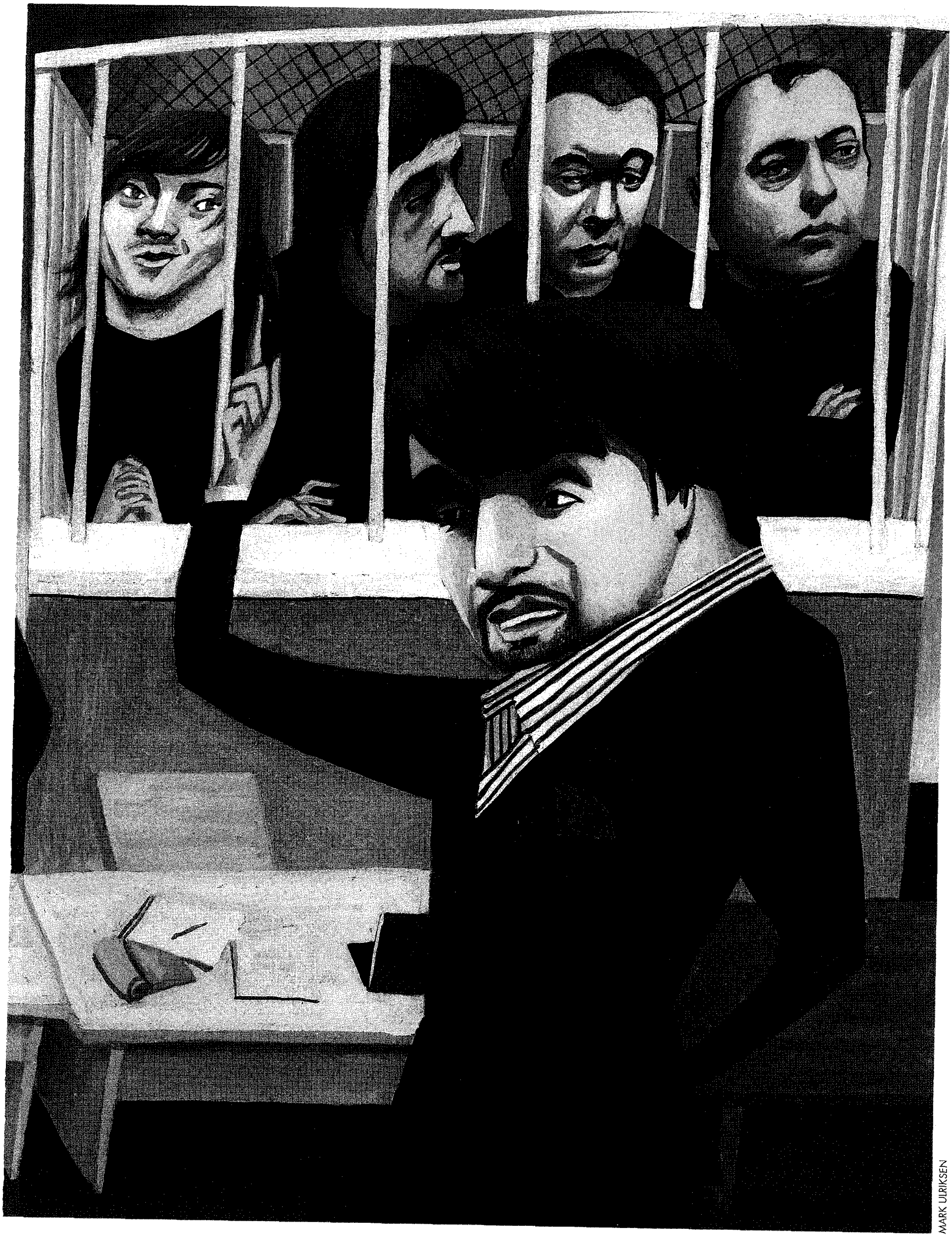
It was hard to know who would have had more cause to kill Politkovskaya: Putin and his Federal Security Bureau (F.S.B.) cohort, which she'd mercilessly criticized; the pro-Kremlin Administration in Chechnya, which she excoriated; or elements of the Russian military in Chechnya, some of whom Politkovskaya had helped put in jail. And why would the murder have happened on Putin's birthday? Cornered a few days later while on a trip to Germany, Putin had reacted defensively. Politkovskaya's death, he said, would do more harm to Russia than her reporting ever did. When, three weeks afterward, an F.S.B. defector was poisoned in London by a rare radioactive isotope, one opposition journalist even took it to be a demonstration of sorts, a way of saying, Here's what a government-sponsored killing actually looks like.

By all accounts, Putin wanted the Politkovskaya killers found, and the investigators were not without clues. Politkovskaya's entryway had a video camera, and her building was next door to the Moscow headquarters of VTB, the country's second-largest bank; all told, there were eight video cameras in the vicinity of the crime. In the days before the killing, they had captured a beat-up green Lada station wagon circling Politkovskaya's building. On October 7th, they recorded the Lada parking around the corner at 2:24 P.M. After an hour and a half, a man emerges from it, walks toward Politkovskaya's building with a jacket wrapped around his left hand, and then enters. The man is thin and wears a baseball cap that shields his face. A few minutes later, a camera shows Politkovskaya approaching the building with her grocery bag, rummaging in her purse for her keys, and going in. Less than a minute later, the man in the baseball cap walks out.

Investigators were able to determine that the owner of the Lada was a native of Chechnya named Rustam Makhmudov. He was the nephew of a well-known mobster and had been wanted by federal authorities since 1997 for kidnapping; for most of that time, he lived in Moscow under an assumed name. Despite being on the run, Makhmudov had interesting



As the eminent human-rights lawyer Karim



MARK ULRIKSEN

oskalenko and the charismatic defense attorney Murad Musaev debated a confounding case, the prosecution often seemed adrift.

friends—in particular, an F.S.B. agent and a former police detective with a federal brief (the equivalent of an F.B.I. agent). At this point, the investigators seemed to catch a break: a colleague of the detective came forward to testify that in the fall of 2006, just weeks before Politkovskaya was killed, the former detective had offered to forgive a large debt that the colleague owed if he carried out surveillance on her.

In August, 2007, ten months after the murder, the arrests began: Rustam Makhmudov had disappeared, but police arrested the F.S.B. agent, the former police detective, and nine others, including three of Rustam's brothers. The Russian prosecutor general held a press conference at which he announced that the case had been solved. At first, investigators fingered the youngest of the Makhmudov brothers, Tamerlan, as the shooter, but Tamerlan was able to establish that he had been in Chechnya in the fall of 2006. But cell-phone records established that Rustam's two other brothers had been in the vicinity of the crime when it happened. What's more, the pattern of their calls was suspicious. Investigators knew from the bank cameras that the shooter had left the green Lada and entered Politkovskaya's building at 3:55 P.M. They now found that at 3:52 P.M. the two brothers had had a cell-phone conversation for a few seconds. The killer left the building at 4:07 P.M. Another short phone call between the brothers took place at 4:08 P.M. The investigators concluded that the shooter was Rustam, and that his two brothers served as his driver and lookout.

That, anyway, was the story the prosecution took to court in mid-November, when the trial began. By then, seven of the original suspects had been released, leaving the two brothers, the former police detective, and the F.S.B. agent. Curiously, the F.S.B. agent, Pavel Ryaguzov, was not on trial for the murder; he was accused of beating a travel agent and extorting money from him in 2002. This case, which had been dropped by the authorities years earlier, was picked up again and put before the court. Ostensibly because both cases involved the former police detective, a man named Sergei Khadzhikurbanov, the travel-agent trial was folded into the Politkovskaya trial, and so for three months the two young Chechens and the two members of the law-enforcement community sat together in a yellow steel cage.

The first thing you noticed once you'd squeezed yourself onto the press bench at the court was that the defense had a very good lawyer. In fact, they had half a dozen lawyers, most of them men (versus two female prosecutors), but Murad Musaev, who was representing the younger of the Makhmudov brothers, Dzhabrail, spoke for all of them. Musaev, just twenty-five years old, and the scion of a prominent Chechen family—his father, after a career in Chechen law enforcement and government, now lives in Moscow and has a stake in one of Moscow's more successful publishing companies—was trained as a corporate lawyer. In 2007, though, he effectively represented the Chechen victims of a Russian war criminal, and in the past few years he has increasingly found himself working as a defender of Chechen rights. Now, in the Moscow District Military Court, dressed in a fitted gray suit and a striped red shirt, with a white-and-red pocket square, Musaev looked as if he'd just stepped out of Chechen *GQ*. On January 20th, he and the other lawyers were finally able to question their clients in court.

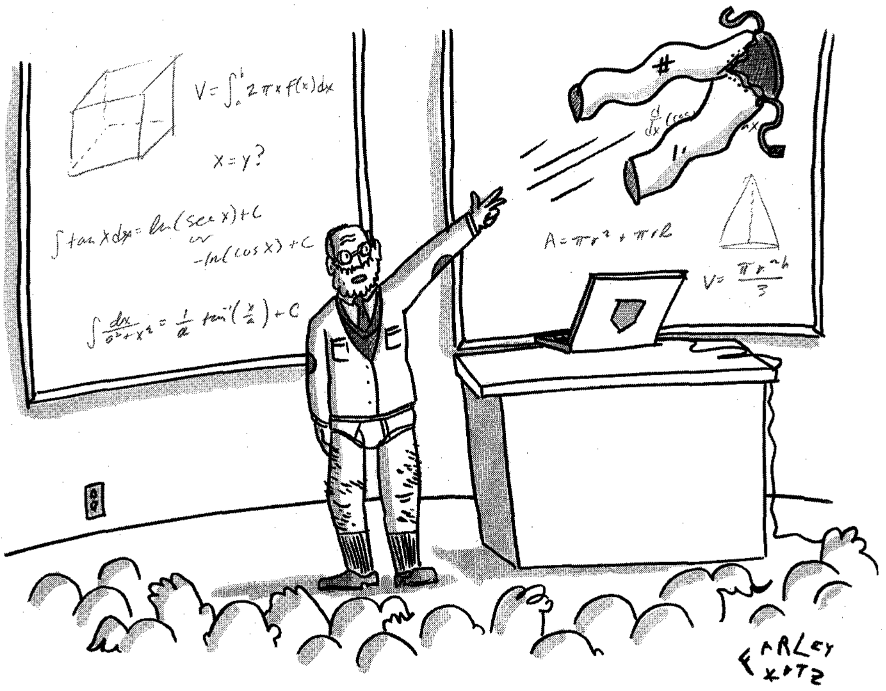
Dzhabrail went first. A nice-looking young man of twenty-six, with a fairly strong Chechen accent, a mop of black hair, and blue eyes, he was accused of driving the Lada on the day of the murder. He stood up in the yellow cage and leaned his head against the bars. "Tell me," Musaev said, sitting with his back to Dzhabrail, both of them facing the jury. "Do you have much skill and experience with surveillance work?"

"No," Dzhabrail said.

"Do you have much skill and experience with criminal work?"

Chuckling slightly and shaking his head, Dzhabrail said he did not.

He was born in Chechnya. When the Russian Army invaded in late 1994, the Makhmudovs escaped to neighboring Ingushetia. A few years later, Dzhabrail came to Moscow to go to college. He'd done well there, and had written a thesis on the Chechen refugee problem. "I travelled all over the Caucasus gathering material, I tortured my poor mother with questions," he said. "My thesis wasn't eighty pages, it was three hundred pages! All my professors said I should keep working on it, that I should go to grad school." He had interviewed people in Moscow. "There's this place called Memorial," he said, referring to the most revered human-rights organization in Russia. "I went there." Had he read Politkovskaya's articles on Chechnya? He wasn't sure, but he suspected that they were there in the mound of material he'd


V = ∫₀ᵇ 2πx f(x) dx
x = y?
∫ tan x dx = ln(sec x) + C or −ln(cos x) + C
∫ dx/(a² + x²) = 1/a tan⁻¹(x/a) + C
A = πr² + πrl
V = πr²h/3
d/dx
FARLEY KATZ

"Today, class, I'm proud to announce my tenure."

gathered for his thesis. In any case, he said, "I knew that she was a very decent and upright person."

This is not what anyone had expected to hear from the getaway driver. He'd graduated from college, returned briefly to Chechnya, and then went back to Moscow in the fall of 2006 to try to start grad school. He passed the first two exams but then the third was English. "I was ashamed to show up," Dzhabrail admitted. "I wasn't prepared." That fall, he spent a lot of his time seeing other members of the Chechen diaspora—a close-knit community ravaged by two wars, discriminated against in Moscow, but also involved in much of the city's underground economy. "Mostly what I was doing was meeting with people who were relatives and grownups who had people in jail. Everyone's relatives were in jail. I met with them all the time and they told me about their problems." Musaev continued his questioning:

MUSAEV: All right, what can you tell us about the incident in question?

DZHABRAIL: What I can tell you is that I was arrested on August 16th and for two weeks they beat me on the head!

MUSAEV: O.K., O.K., but without the beating on the head. What were you doing on October 7th?

DZHABRAIL: I can't remember specifically. I did what I usually do. All my days were the same. I went around Moscow. I met with people. It was like one long day.

Dzhabrail's answers spilled out of him with palpable sincerity, full of digressions and bits of his life philosophy and his education. Musaev knew that the longer he kept Dzhabrail talking the more charmed the jury would become. He was resourceful, asking the same questions with a slightly new angle over and over. One of the prosecutors, out of desperation, started leaning over from her chair and staring at the screen of Musaev's laptop. Eventually, Musaev noticed this.

"What?" he said. "My questions."

"With the *answers*."

Musaev was out of his chair. "Your Honor!" he said. He'd taken his laptop with him. "I am tired of this hee-hee and ha-ha, I am tired of these insinuations! Yes, I have notes for my questions, but for the first time in my career I did not rehearse with my client, because I wanted his answers to be natural! Even the most cursory glance at this"—and here he planted his Sony Vaio before the judge, Colonel Yevgeny Zubov—"will demonstrate that my defendant's answers have nothing in common with what I've written there."

"All right, all right," Judge Zubov said, waving the computer away.

Eventually, Musaev resumed his questioning. Dzhabrail couldn't remember why he'd called his brother six times on October 7, 2006, but he knew it wasn't strange. "I call my brother two, three, five times a day, sometimes twenty times a day," Dzhabrail said. "If he doesn't answer, I keep calling—what if something happened to him?" The more one listened to Dzhabrail, the more difficult it became to imagine that he had ever been involved in the murder of any living thing. Yet he could not say what he was doing on October 7th: "Why should I remember? If I'm a normal person and all the days are the same?" If he was innocent, though, why was he in that neighborhood? If he was not innocent, it meant that the organizers had involved in their plot a young man who shared Politkovskaya's beliefs, had worked on some of the same issues; who was bright, eager, and extremely sweet and personable; who'd known perfectly well that Politkovskaya was a "very decent and upright person." Musaev asked him if anyone had ever told him to do harm to Politkovskaya, or participate in a plot to harm her. "No one who knew me would ask me that," Dzhabrail said. "No one who knew me would even talk about such a thing while I was around."

One person in the room was unconvinced by Dzhabrail's testimony: Ilya Politkovsky, the victim's son. Thirty years old, a little chubby and in an expensive shirt, Ilya looked less like the son of a dissident journalist than like one of the successful young men who fill Moscow's mid-priced restaurants and upscale coffee shops. In fact, this was about right: Ilya had been sent to England for high school and college, and now works in public relations. In the courtroom, he was a ball of energy, watching Dzhabrail's testimony with intensity, whispering to his lawyer when he thought he'd spotted a contradiction. "He's digging a hole for himself!" he said at one point, though it wasn't at all obvious that Dzhabrail was.

"I'm sure they know something," he said of the brothers a few days later, when we met in a sushi restaurant near the agency where he works. "Clearly, they're afraid of something. Maybe it's their family. Maybe it's someone else." He didn't believe that they couldn't remember October 7th. "When something really important happens, you remember. I remember what I was doing all day when the Twin Towers fell. I remember what I was doing during Nord-Ost"—he was referring to the Moscow theatre that was taken over by Chechen terrorists in 2002. "I remember what I was doing in the days of Beslan"—the southern town where Chechen terrorists seized a school in 2004. "Honest, I can. Events like that remain in a person's memory."

I suggested that the murder of Anna Politkovskaya would not necessarily have registered that way with the Makhmudov brothers.

"If you got into a car that evening, and turned on the radio, what did you hear?" Ilya responded. "Just one piece of news. The brother who says he wrote a dissertation and all that—he says he doesn't remember? I don't believe it. I do not believe it."

It is an emotionally powerful feature of Russian criminal law that the "side of the victims"—*storona poterpevshykh*—is represented on an equal footing with the prosecution and the defense. The counsel for the victims is allowed to call and question witnesses, submit protests to the court, make closing remarks. It's an ambiguous institution: where the prosecution wants a conviction, and the defense wants an acquittal, the victims want justice—or, as the victims and their lawyers in this case kept saying, "the truth." Ilya could never have been an idle observer of the trial, but in this case he was also, as they say, lawyered up.

In keeping with the importance of the case, the Politkovsky legal team was led by Karinna Moskalenko, the best known human-rights lawyer in Russia. Now in her mid-fifties, she has been a defense attorney in numerous politically motivated cases, including the 2005 trial of the oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky (who, after he started funding opposition parties, was convicted of fraud and tax evasion) and some harassing cases against the opposition leader Garry Kasparov; she was the first Russian lawyer to present oral arguments before the European Court of Human Rights, in Strasbourg. She was a good friend of Politkovskaya. In the courtroom, Moskalenko exuded moral authority; she did not take part in the minor and increasingly personal squabbles that flared up between the prosecution and the defense; and, when she spoke, people listened. "Your Honor," she would preface many of her remarks, her voice carrying across the room, "the side of the victims believes that . . ."

But Moskalenko did not know what to make of Dzhabrail. She asked him about his studies; she asked him about his family. She tried to help him remember what he was doing in the neighborhood of Politkovskaya's building that day—maybe he was running an errand to the nearby Butyrki prison, as he'd said he'd done many times? No, Dzhabrail said, he was pretty sure he wasn't. Perhaps someone had merely asked him to stand somewhere, sit somewhere, in a car for example, not telling him what it was about?

"You know, I've thought about that a lot since I got picked up," Dzhabrail said. "Could someone have set me up? Could one of my *family members* have set me up somehow? And I thought about it and thought about it and decided that no, that couldn't be. One hundred per cent no."

The trial was remarkably open. Judge Zubov, who had been widely condemned after he attempted to close the proceedings to the press, was hardly an authoritarian figure: one of the journalists dubbed him "Winnie the Pooh." He did not seem to want, and he certainly did not exercise, control over the courtroom. Everyone, including the defendants, spoke pretty much when they pleased; the parents of the Makhmudov brothers, who sat there every day, never taking off their overcoats, occasionally called out in Chechen. Especially liberal were the breaks: Judge Zubov was most authoritative when announcing them, early and often. Then the radio reporters would get sound recordings, sometimes from the defendants in their cage: you could just walk up to them and start asking questions. In the corridor, the journalists, the lawyers, the jurors, and the families of the victim and the accused all mixed together. (The prosecutors had their own office, and retired there.) During one break, I spoke with Dzhabrail's brother Tamerlan, who had been held in custody for ten months.

"What was it like?"

"Bad."

"They hit you?"

"Yup."

"In the face?"

"No," he said, smiling shyly. "They can't hit you in the face, it leaves a mark. They hit you here, in the kidneys. Also they put a bag over your head and crumple up little dry crackers in it, and eventually you have to breathe them into your lungs and it scratches up your insides. You start spitting blood. So that's a little thing they do."

We were called back inside.

After Dzhabrail's testimony was finished, it was his brother Ibragim's turn. He was accused of standing on the street about half a mile from Politkovskaya's building and calling Dzhabrail when he saw her car drive past. Ibragim, twenty-nine, was a lot less charming than Dzhabrail. "Do you understand what you're accused of?" his lawyer asked him. "If someone had explained it to me, I'd understand," Ibragim said. Tall, broad-shouldered but underweight, with sunken eyes, he did not look well. He'd gone to the same college as Dzhabrail, but, as he volunteered, he was no scholar: he'd been kicked out seven times. His lawyer asked if he had ever read Politkovskaya's articles. "I'm trying to tell you," Ibragim said. "I never read *anything*."

In the fall of 2006, Ibragim was working odd jobs, driving a taxi, helping out at the Litkino fish market. He could account for much of his time in

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CIVILIZATION

There's an art
to everything. How
the rain means
April and an ongoing-ness like
that of song until at last

it ends. A centuries-old
set of silver handbells that
once an altar boy swung,
processing . . . *You're the same*
wilderness you've always

been, slashing through briars,
the bracken
of your invasive
self. So he said,
in a dream. But

the rest of it—all the rest—
was waking: more often
than not, to the next
extravagance. Two blackamoor
statues, each mirroring

the other, each hoisting
forever upward his burden of
hand-painted, carved-by-hand
peacock feathers. *Don't*
you know it, don't you know

I love you, he said. He was
shaking. He said,
I love you. There's an art

to everything. What I've
done with this life,

what I'd meant not to do,
or would have meant, maybe, had I
understood, though I have
no regrets. Not the broken but
still flowering dogwood. Not

the honey locust, either. Not even
the ghost walnut with its
non-branches whose
every shadow is memory,
memory . . . As he said to me

once, *That's all garbage*
down the river, now. Turning,
but as the utterly lost—
because addicted—do:
resigned all over again. It

only looked, it—
It must only look
like leaving. There's an art
to everything. Even
turning away. How

eventually even hunger
can become a space
to live in. How they made
out of shamelessness something
beautiful, for as long as they could.

—*Carl Phillips*

the months before the crime but could not say what he was doing in Politkovskaya's neighborhood on the afternoon of October 7th. He'd been seen at a birthday party that night; this he now remembered fondly. "I came into the café and there was all this food and so I said, 'Hey, Happy Birthday! Congratulations!' And then I ate all the food." When he was asked how it was possible that he could remember what he'd been doing in the evening and not what he'd been doing during the day, Ibragim thought of a joke. "I'll tell you why: I ate so much food at that birthday party, I forgot everything!"

Everyone laughed, though unhappily. Later in the trial, the lead prosecutor, responding to another outburst of laughter in the court, reminded everyone that they were at a murder trial. Sometimes it felt like a murder trial; most of the time it didn't.

Outside the courthouse, the country's ongoing financial crisis had put some life back into the tiny government opposition. Its supporters declared the last day in January "a day of dissent." Rallies were organized, some permissions were refused, and, as usual, the Kremlin allowed itself some larger counter-rallies. Arrests were made. The next day, a Sunday, a memorial meeting was held for the young lawyer, Stanislav Markelov, and the *Novaya Gazeta* freelancer who'd been shot.

The Politkovskaya trial had created a schism in Moscow liberal circles. On one side were people who felt they'd seen this show before: two Chechens in the dock; dubious evidence; well-publicized arrests. It was just like the trial of the alleged killers of Paul Klebnikov, the *Forbes* journalist who'd been shot outside his office from a black Lada in July, 2004. Even the investigator of the case was the same, and those accused had been acquitted. On the other side was *Novaya Gazeta,* the loudest opposition paper in Russia, which believed that this time, at least, the authorities had done their job. Partway through the trial, *Novaya Gazeta's* deputy editor, Sergei Sokolov, exasperated by the media coverage, held a "briefing" for journalists. Few came away convinced.

Everyone was at the memorial meeting: the human-rights campaigners who thought the Makhmudov brothers were innocent, and editors from *Novaya Gazeta*, who thought they were guilty. It was the coldest day of the year, five degrees Fahrenheit, and at the public square Chistye Prudy speaker after speaker got up to talk about the work that the lawyer Markelov had done on behalf of nascent independent unions, opposition journalists (he had defended Politkovskaya against charges of libel), and anti-Fascist activists. "The cops aren't shit!" a tall young man in sunglasses from the group Antifa, which engages in fistfights with Nazi gangs on the streets, declared. "They come to our meetings and get them on video"—there was, in fact, a beefy man with a camcorder standing up on a height and scanning the crowd with his camera—"but when it comes to protecting us they're too afraid!"

An eco-activist spoke about one of Markelov's clients, the journalist Mikhail Beketov, who had tried to fight an attempt by city officials to run a major highway through the forest north of Moscow. In mid-November, Beketov had been attacked in front of his home. The attackers crushed his fingers and skull and broke his leg. Then they left him in the cold; when he was finally taken to a hospital, more than twenty-four hours later, he was in a coma and the leg and several fingers had to be amputated.

Some of the speeches were fiery, most were quieter. "Look around you," said a thickset young man in glasses, with a big bright-orange hat that came down awkwardly over his eyes. "Look at the faces of the people around you who are out here in the cold. They're the people who will protect you." It did not seem as if there were enough of them.

The alleged organizer of the murder of Anna Politkovskaya, Sergei Khadzhikurbanov, was an odd character. Dark, short, and solidly built, he'd worked until 2003 in the Moscow police's organized-crime department, in an "ethnic unit" devoted to the criminal organizations run by ethnic diasporas in the capital. "This is a hateful figure to me," Musaev, the lead defense lawyer, admitted. "This is a person whose job it was to destroy Chechens. I remember people like him used to come and search my home when I was a kid." In 2003, Khadzhikurbanov was jailed for allegedly beating a drug dealer during a search. (The conviction was overturned in 2006.) Now he was accused of recruiting Politkovskaya's killers and of procuring the gun for Rustam Makhmudov.

But Khadzhikurbanov was also a true believer. He had served in Chechnya in both the first and the second Chechen wars. He had stormed the Nord-Ost theatre in October, 2002, when it was occupied by Chechen terrorists. He was well spoken and quick to take offense. Unlike his good friend Ryaguzov, from the F.S.B., who spent much of the trial poring over a book of crossword puzzles, Khadzhikurbanov often brought a folder with papers to the sessions and rustled through it as the trial proceeded. Of all the defendants, he was the most eager to engage with journalists during the breaks and plead his case.

Khadzhikurbanov barely bothered to deny the accusations that he'd assaulted the travel agent: he was convinced that the man was forging passports for Chechen rebels. But he was incredulous at the Politkovskaya indictment. He'd never seen Ibragim until they walked into court together; he had met Dzhabrail just once, when the boys' jailed uncle asked him to give Dzhabrail three hundred dollars for groceries. The police officer who was the lone witness against Khadzhikurbanov was a liar who owed him a lot of money, and might himself have been behind the murder. What's more, Khadzhikurbanov had got out of prison only on September 22, 2006.

"What did you do after your release?" his lawyer asked him.

"I organized a killing in fifteen days."

"No, really, what did you do?"

"I did what anyone who had just been in prison for two years would do, who has a family and kids."

"You spent time with your family," the Judge said.

"Yes."

Musaev interjected, "It's possible I missed something, maybe my attention wandered, but did the prosecution at any point say anything at all about you buying a gun, where you got the gun, and who you got it from?"

It hadn't, actually.

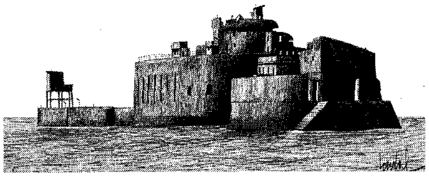
At this point, Musaev, having just recently demonstrated that his client was a sweetheart and his client's brother and alleged co-conspirator an idiot, had a follow-up question for Khadzhikurbanov.

"Tell me: If you were planning to carry out surveillance on someone, would you hire for this task a professional, or would you hire the brothers Makhmudov, one of whom was trying to apply to graduate school, and the other of whom lugged fish at the Litkino market?"

"I would hire professionals," Khadzhikurbanov said.

The evidence, it was becoming clear, was a little sparse; once Musaev started going through it, you began to wonder if there was any evidence at all. The green Lada: studying the video of Politkovskaya's street on October 7th, Musaev found seven other green Ladas. This seemed like a lot of Ladas even in a country full of Ladas. Musaev proposed that the featured green Lada was a decoy.

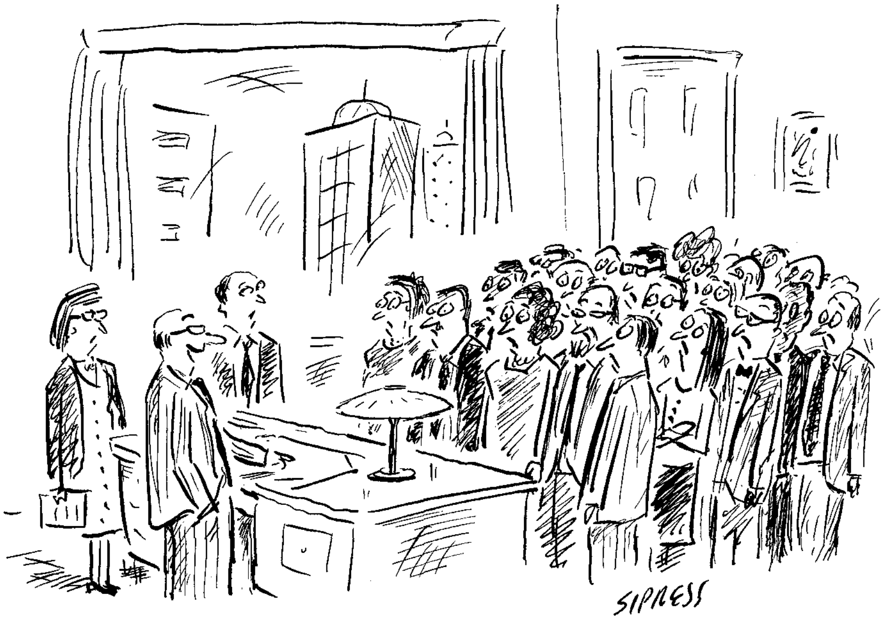
Politkovskaya's route home: in order to demonstrate that Ibragim had waited as a lookout for Politkovskaya's car, the prosecution produced a map on which they charted her route home from the supermarket. Musaev, dissatisfied with the details and especially with what he considered the skewed scale of the map—"this Picasso painting," he called it—demonstrated that Politkovskaya could have taken a different route home and bypassed Ibragim.



There was more. The Ramstore supermarket where Politkovskaya shopped on October 7th also had video cameras, and they seemed to have the wrong date. The time on the camera in Politkovskaya's entryway was not synchronized with the time on the bank cameras, nor was it synchronized with the cameras in the other entryways. There were explanations for all these discrepancies, but their cumulative effect was powerful, and it set up the most significant of the questions that Musaev had for the prosecution, dealing with the veracity of the cell-phone records.

The cell-phone records were a mess. They had initially been submitted to the court not as a printout but as an Excel file that any user could alter. Throughout the trial, all such documents were displayed on a large flat-screen monitor that would be mounted on the desk before the jurors, and at one point Musaev connected his laptop to the screen, opened a copy of the Excel file on his computer, deleted "Dzhabrail Makhmudov," and typed in the name of the lead investigator of the case, "Petros Garibyan." He further showed that the author of the file wasn't the cell-phone company, MegaPhone, but the "Interior Ministry"; i.e., the police. In the column that should have said "User" or "Customer," it said, instead, "Principal." This, too, could be explained—investigators had, for their own convenience, transferred the cell-phone records to an Excel file. But then they had made a humiliating mistake: Dzhabrail's records showed six calls between him and Ibragim, while Ibragim's showed only four. Musaev immediately declared the cell-phone records fake.

The phone records became one of the two great evidentiary scandals of the trial. Moskalenko asked the court to request new records from the cell-phone company, and when they came back they did so as a printout, not as an Excel file, and the phone calls corresponded. But Musaev at this point was indomitable. "They fixed their mistakes," he said. "Good for them." By the end of the trial, he was convinced that all the evidence was cooked up. When I told him I found it easier to believe in technical or human error than in a conspiracy at the investigators' office, he answered with a lawyer joke: "A man on trial is asked, 'What can you say in your defense?' 'Your Honor, I



"We're still the same great company we've always been, only we've ceased to exist."

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was peeling an orange on the street. This gentleman was walking by, accidentally slipped on the rind, and fell on my peeling knife.' So the judge says, 'And this happened twenty-eight times?' "

Ilya Politkovsky was one of the few people in the courtroom who had no doubt about the authenticity of the records, just as he had no doubt about the guilt—in one way or another—of the accused. It was a matter of faith more than anything, as he himself knew. "What am I going to do," he said to me finally when I pointed out all the problems with the case, "not believe *Novaya Gazeta*?" You had to trust someone, and the opposition newspaper for which your mother worked was a start.

But the tactical effect of the phone-records argument was to shift the moral burden of the case: Musaev was no longer opposed to the Politkovskaya family, he was opposed to the falsifications of the authorities. And, like it or not, the Politkovskaya family, in accepting the validity of the phone calls, found itself on the falsifiers' side.

Then there was the problem of Rustam. The indictment, which runs to two hundred pages, devotes a great deal of space to him. We are told that the killer wore sneakers with a white midsole; witnesses report that Rustam also wore sneakers like that. Further witnesses describe his appearance, and for several pages the evidence of Rustam's height is the lone detail set off in bold: "**approximately 165-167 cm tall**"; "**approximately 167 cm tall**"; "**approximately 168 cm tall**"; "**approximately 165 cm tall.**"

At the end of all this comes the following paragraph:

> According to the conclusions of the forensic photography expert, the man entering A. S. Politkovskaya's building before her arrival and leaving the building immediately after her shooting is **167 centimetres tall.**

During the proceedings, the eldest Makhmudov brother inhabited a gray area: he wasn't on trial, but his brothers were on trial for abetting him, and so the claim that he was the shooter was a key part of the case. Yet the defense managed to cast doubt on the assertion that this was Rustam. For one thing, he had been in a bad car accident in 2004, had broken his hip, and now had a limp. For another, the killer in the baseball cap was thin, whereas Rustam was heavyset. The boys' mother had brought some old photos of him, but these were not admitted as evidence—the Judge argued that Rustam's identity fell outside the bounds of the case. Nevertheless, Dzhabrail, during his testimony, had been asked if the security-camera photo of the killer looked like Rustam. "I'm telling you, when they showed me that photo and told me it was Rustam, I couldn't believe it," he said to the court. "I said, '*This*? *This* is what you have? I've been counting on your decency! I thought you had something!' Because the thing about Rustam is, he has a body type, how should I put this?" He looked around the room to try to find someone overweight. Some of the jurors were overweight, and Judge Zubov was overweight, but Dzhabrail had enough presence of mind not to remark on it. Finally, he said, "The thing is, he just really struggled with his weight!"

The certainty that it was Rustam on that video was slowly crumbling. A lot of people are a hundred and sixty-seven centimetres tall.

Almost all the Russian journalists who regularly attended the trial believed that the defendants were innocent and had been framed. "You don't understand how things are done here," a young court reporter named Anatoly Karavaev, from *Vremya Novostei,* told me. "They just do a dragnet for Chechens and see what comes up. But these guys are innocent. Dzhabrail is an educated person."

"Why can't he remember what he was doing on October 7th?" I asked.

"Who can remember what they were doing on October 7th? I can't remember what I was doing two days ago. And you heard him: they just start beating you and beating you and telling you to remember. I wouldn't be able to remember anything."

We were walking to the metro after a day in court as Karavaev laid this all out for me. "When this started, I thought they were guilty," he told me. "They're Chechens. You know how Russians feel about Chechens. They're all criminals, they're all guilty. But now... I don't think so. Because I know how the police do things. They were told to find someone, so they found someone."

"They have nothing," Karavaev continued the next day, during yet another break. He'd spent the night online reading Russian Wikipedia. "The whole thing's a frameup, it's made to order, the F.S.B. has made things clear to the Judge. What more is there to say?"

Suddenly, we were interrupted from the other end of the journalists' bench by the oldest reporter at the trial, a dry, somewhat withdrawn character from one of the city's most respected dailies. He now demanded of Karavaev how long he'd been covering the courts.

"Not long," Karavaev admitted.

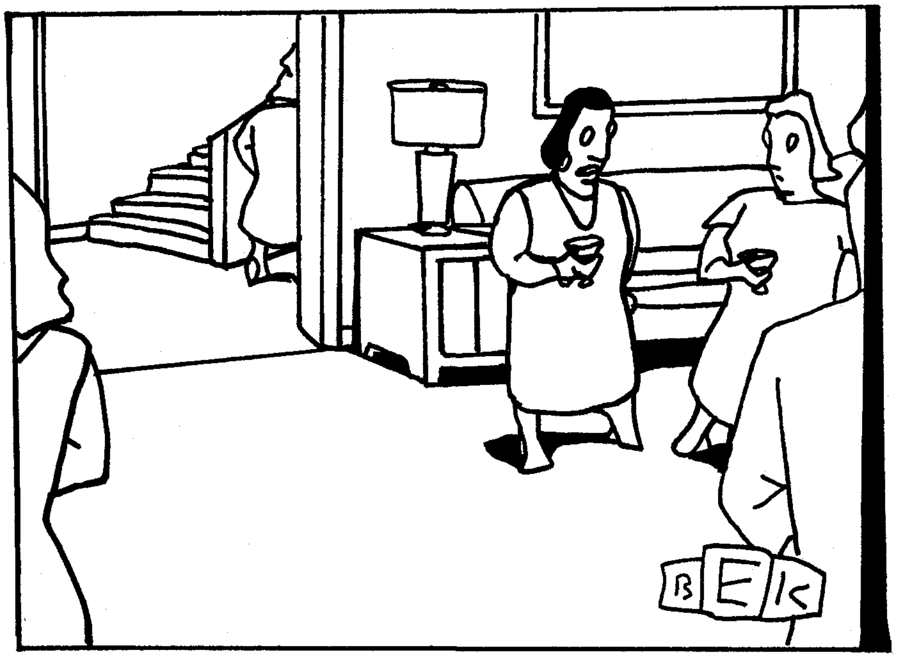
"And I've been covering them for fifteen years. In that time, I've seen five frameups. Five. You can tell when you see it. Spend some years in the courts and then we can talk."

We were interrupted at this point by Musaev, who had, he said, seen more than five frameups already, and he hadn't been working as a lawyer for very long at all.

That day, the veteran reporter took Karavaev and me to lunch at McDonald's. "Might the F.S.B. have killed her using Chechen hands?" he wondered, over a tray laden with four cheeseburgers. "Maybe. I think that's what happened. But it's not like Putin told someone, 'Go kill Politkovskaya.' And then signed a Presidential order about it. No. But maybe they were sitting around at the F.S.B. one day and some major general said, 'Jesus fucking Christ, this Politkovskaya, isn't there anything we can do about her?' And one of the lieutenant colonels said, 'General, I think we can.' And that was it, that was the whole conversation. Or maybe Ramzan"—Ramzan Kadyrov, the Moscow-backed ruler of Chechnya, against whom Politkovskaya had written her most vicious pieces—"was sitting around and he said, 'This *bitch*. Are you telling me we can't do anything about this?' And someone there said, 'I think we can.' And then they got in touch with their friends in the F.S.B. and those guys said, 'Oh, you have that problem? Because, yeah, we have that problem, too. Let's work together on this.'

"The thing about Anna Stepanovna," he went on, "was that she'd started going after all of them personally. That's the funny thing about Russia. And about Chechnya in particular. It's not reporting on someone's business that gets you, it's going after them personally. It's one thing to say, 'Look at all this money that got stolen.' That wasn't enough for her. She said Ramzan was a 'coward hiding behind his bodyguards.' I mean, she said this of a Chechen. Can you imagine that? A woman saying that of a Chechen?" He shook his head. "She kept pushing the envelope. She kept going after them personally. You felt like this was her destiny: that's where she was heading and she knew it. And then it happened."

Two years after the murder, the Politkovskaya case was falling apart. There was a car, but the car's owner was on the run. There were some phone calls, but they were merely phone calls. Ilya Politkovsky, keeping up his spirits, occasionally turned to the journalists sitting behind him and said, "Today is going to be very interesting," or, "Listen to this carefully. It's very interesting." It never was. Everyone kept waiting for some sign of life from the prosecutors; they watched glumly, seldom interrupting, while Musaev argued their indictment into oblivion.



"He and I connected physically, spiritually, emotionally, financially, humorously, technologically, and self-destructively."

Prosecutors in Russia don't often have trouble getting convictions: bench trials have a ninety-nine-per-cent conviction rate; even jury trials, which are rare (and usually reserved for the most egregious crimes), have a seventy-five-per-cent conviction rate. Musaev confessed to me that he had zero wins and ten losses in criminal trials with a presiding judge, and this was his first jury trial. When I put all this to Ilya Politkovsky, he assured me that the prosecution was going to come with a lot of heat in the portion of the trial where the sides presented "additional" evidence. Instead, the prosecutor stood up and said, "We're in a bit of an awkward situation. You see, the evidence that we were going to present today has been lost. And we can't proceed without it." Turmoil ensued. It was soon revealed that the "evidence" in question was just a compact disk with a PowerPoint presentation that showed the movements of Politkovskaya and the getaway car on the day of the murder. It was a file that all the lawyers and even Ilya Politkovsky also had on their computers. Still, it presented an excellent opportunity for squabbling.

"Your Honor, I don't know why the prosecution has lost this evidence," Musaev said.

"*We* didn't lose it! *You're* the one who had it last! Your Honor, I think the defense is trying to drag out the case."

"Your Honor!" Musaev was up again. "The defense is in no wise or way interested in any form whatsoever in delaying the continuation of this case! Our clients are in jail!"

The jurors were released for the day. The wire-service reporters rushed into the hallway to file reports that a key piece of evidence had been lost; for the first time in weeks, Politkovskaya led the news cycle.

It was too early for lunch, and so I stayed in the courtroom. Ilya let me study the controversial PowerPoint file on his laptop. It listed all the cameras near Politkovskaya's building that were used to capture shots of the green Lada and of the shooter practicing his entrance and exit in the days before the killing. It had a map of Dzhabrail and Ibragim Makhmudov's whereabouts, as per cell-tower locations. It showed photographs of the shooter entering the building, and Politkovskaya approaching the building and rummaging for her keys, and then it showed the gruesome photos of her crumpled on the floor of the elevator, blood from the gunshot in her gray hair. A time stamp accompanied all the photos: 15:57:38; 16:06:28; 16:07:03.

When I finished, I saw that a small group—including Ilya and Moskalenko—had gathered around Musaev, who was sitting in front of his laptop. I came over just as he pressed a button and a video began to play. It was from July, 2007. There was a river, it was a sunny day, and some young men in swim trunks were covered in mud. They were throwing the mud at one another and laughing, chasing after each other with the mud. I recognized Tamerlan, the youngest Makhmudov brother; he kept whipping mud at a sturdy, full-bellied man. It was Rustam, nine months after the shooting. Dzhabrail was holding the camera—it was his cell phone, which was already part of the evidence for the case. Everyone watched it in silence, amazed. "Turn on the sound," Moskalenko said.

"They're just playing," Ibragim's lawyer said. "You think they're going to say, 'Remember how we killed Politkovskaya?' "

Musaev turned on the sound. " 'I'm holding the fort!' " someone translated from Chechen. " 'I'm coming at him from the side. I've scored a direct hit!' "

"All right," Moskalenko said.

"They're playing at war," Ibragim's lawyer said.

"I get it," Moskalenko said.

Musaev turned off the sound. It was a month before the younger brothers were all arrested. There was no way that the bearlike man in the video was the same as the thin man in the baseball cap who had entered and exited Politkovskaya's building just before and after she was killed.

One of the biggest problems with the case was that, for a contract killing, it didn't seem to have left a money trail. When, during closed-session testimony, Lom-Ali Gaitukayev, the Makhmudovs' mobster uncle, had been given a market estimate of two million dollars for such an assassination, he joked, "That money doesn't seem to have reached my nephews." Earlier, in one of the more contentious moments in the trial, Moskalenko had tried to figure out what Dzhabrail Makhmudov lived on. He was evasive, but it was evident that he was living cheaply, staying on people's couches, taking money from his older brothers. Moskalenko wanted to know how he managed to talk so much on the phone. "That's expensive," she said.

"No, it's not," Dzhabrail said. "I had a *tariff fixe*. It cost three hundred rubles"—about eleven dollars—"a month. And it still costs three hundred rubles a month! Forever. If I ever get out of here, that's how much it'll cost."

The prosecution also tried to find the money. Quite dramatically, it told the court that Pavel Ryaguzov had bought an eighty-thousand-dollar Land Rover in the fall of 2006. Ryaguzov shook his head and said he'd had to take a loan to buy the car.

"For how long?" Judge Zubov grew interested.

"Three years."

"Could you have managed that?"

"Well, I traded in my BMW, so it wasn't as much."

"Oh," the Judge said.

Everyone in the court acted as if the prosecution had failed once again. "That's nothing," the veteran reporter said as we filed out for lunch. "Show me those boys"—Ibragim and Dzhabrail—"in a Land Rover, then it'll mean something." The open secret of the trial as it touched on the F.S.B. and the police was that they were already incredibly corrupt. "Friends," Musaev said in his closing statement, "has any of you ever visited Lubyanka Square in Moscow? Have you looked at the cars parked there? It goes Mercedes, Audi, BMW. Mercedes, Audi, BMW. Ryaguzov's Land Rover was probably the cheapest car in the whole lot." One evening, as I was wandering around the Arbat after a very long session, I happened to spot Judge Zubov eating dinner with a number of court employees in the Bosfor, a popular, mid-priced Turkish restaurant. And I thought of one of Khadzhikurbanov's outbursts when the prosecutor mentioned a dinner he'd had with Ryaguzov and a prominent Chechen businessman in the upscale Napoleon Restaurant, in late September of 2006. "So what?" Khadzhikurbanov cried out. "I ate at nice restaurants all the time!"

He was a former police officer with a wife and three young kids who had just got out of jail—and yet you believed that, even without participating in a high-priced contract killing, he had enough going on that he could eat out all he wanted. It was a world through which money circulated, and a world to which, as it turned out, the Judge and the prosecutors didn't have access. They sounded like people who, when faced with the ways of the rich, immediately suspect a sinister plot. Of course, they're right: there *is* a plot. It just wasn't necessarily a plot to kill Politkovskaya. And so, in court, the F.S.B. officer and the former police detective laughed at them.

On February 3rd, an elderly journalist in a suburb north of Moscow was apparently attacked outside his house. Two days later, the editor-in-chief of the independent radio station Ekho Moskvy came home to find a log with an axe sticking out of it lying outside his door.

At the Politkovskaya trial, once it became clear that the defendants were not guilty of the crimes of which they had been accused, the question became how a case so important could possibly have come to court with an indictment so obviously weak. Even the defendants had theories on this score. "They've already got what they wanted," Ryaguzov said during one break. "They got to announce on television that they'd arrested an F.S.B. agent. It doesn't matter what happens next. They've already said it, they've already won."

Musaev hypothesized that the government hadn't counted on Musaev. "These boys come from a poor family," he said. "They didn't have money to live on, much less for a lawyer." (Musaev was working for free.) He asked if I'd seen Ibragim's court-appointed lawyer, "the little one, with glasses." He said, "They'd have got lawyers like that, who sit quietly the whole trial. I'm not trying to brag, but a fact is a fact. Now at least there's some hope."

There was a further reason for the weakness of the case. On the day of the murder, the cameras at the Ramstore supermarket had captured two people, a man and a woman, who were clearly following Politkovskaya. This would explain how the shooter knew so precisely when Politkovskaya would get home. (It wasn't because Ibragim was standing on some street corner.) What's more, unlike the video of the shooter in front of Politkovskaya's building, the Ramstore video shows the suspects' faces. According to Sergei Sokolov, of *Novaya Gazeta,* the investigation followed the trail of these people very aggressively at first, and then suddenly stopped. The suggestion was that the people in that video were untouchable.

In the last stages of the trial, the prosecution made a few final attempts to salvage the indictment. The junior prosecutor announced that the cell-phone company MegaPhone had been asked if it could give a more precise location for Dzhabrail on the afternoon of October 7th, and MegaPhone, somehow triangulating among the cell towers that had transmitted the calls, had come back with a map that put Dzhabrail exactly in front of Politkovskaya's door. Musaev was immediately on his feet, claiming that this degree of precision was technically impossible.

He turned to Khadzhikurbanov. "Tell me, did you ever have occasion to use these kinds of services?"

"A hundred times," Khadzhikurbanov said. "Though I never slapped together anything as clumsy as this."

And, when the defense finally played the video of a bulky Rustam covered in mud, the junior prosecutor held the phone up in the air in response and said, "But there's another video in here, of a thin man." She brought the phone to Dzhabrail, in his cage. "Tell me. Who's this?"

"Actually, that's me," Dzhabrail said.

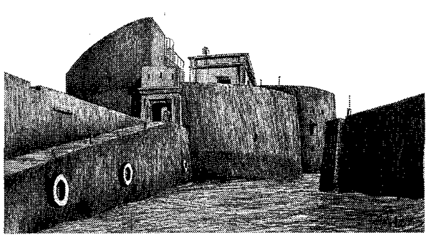
Musaev's final statement, which took up nearly two hours, conveyed his fervent belief in the innocence of the accused. More than that, he was defending two young men, and he himself was young. He sensed that, at some level, everyone was proud of him. The Judge, though often irritated that Musaev never stopped arguing, was proud of him; the jurors, eight of whom were middle-aged women, old enough to be his mother, were proud of him; and the young journalists, who were proud of their contemporary, claimed that they sometimes even caught the prosecutors looking proud of him. Maybe it was tinctured by paternal benevolence toward an upstanding member of a "problem" minority. In any case, Musaev concluded by playing on this feeling of pride. "I'm speaking today before you, but I have two more jurors than everyone else," he said, and went on:

> I have two more jurors, because when I first took on this case the first to object were my parents. My own mother said to me, "How can you be on the other side of the barricades? This woman did so much for the people of our country. She saved so many crippled lives." And I said to her, "Mom, I'm not on the other side of the barricades from Anna Politkovskaya or her children. I'm on the other side of the barricades from the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation, which pretends to solve crimes and wants to call the innocent guilty. And this is not something lawyers in our country need any getting used to—we are always on that side of the barricades." And this is precisely why today I have two extra jurors, because today I invited my father and mother, so they could hear just how little this indictment is worth, so they could judge between myself and the state accusers just as you are judging, honorable members of the jury. That's all.

Khadzhikurbanov's lawyer gave a short closing statement that included the argument that Khadzhikurbanov could not possibly have organized the killing on October 7th, because it was his mother's birthday.

The most intricate closing statement was Moskalenko's. In sixty minutes, it expressed all the ambiguity and difficulty of the trial. She was a defender of human rights, but in this case, in defending the rights of the victims, she was supposed to be allied with the prosecution. This was not a role she enjoyed, especially in a trial where the prosecution was working with an untenable indictment.

Now she went through the evidence against the Makhmudov brothers. She expressed doubt that they couldn't remember October 7th. But she certainly wasn't prepared to accuse them of murder. She pointed out that Anna Politkovskaya had spent most of her last years standing up for the rights of poor Chechen families, families like the Makhmudovs. "We do not accuse," Moskalenko said. "We categorically do not accuse. We are on the side of the victims."



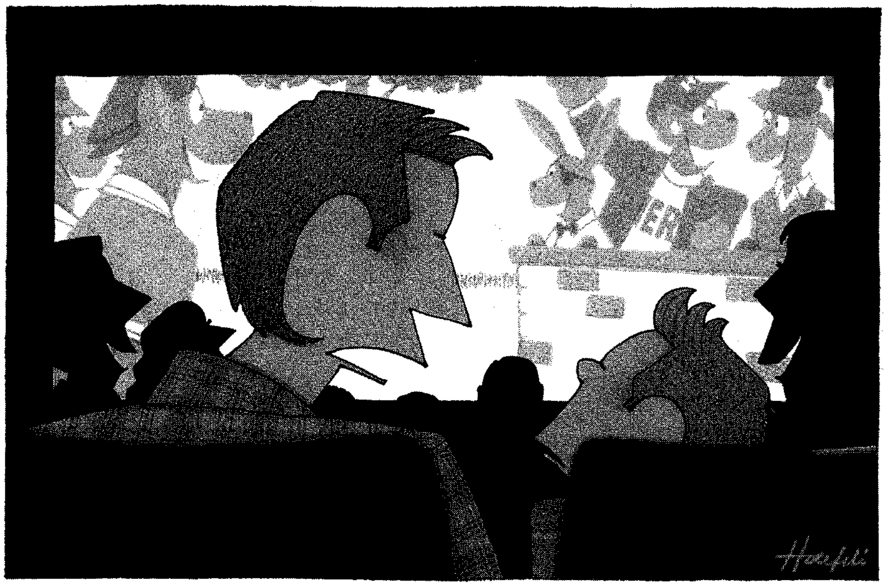
She moved on to Khadzhikurbanov and Ryaguzov with much greater zeal. The evidence against them was thin to nonexistent: Moskalenko knew that. And yet she also knew that they were guilty. They were guilty of collaborating with a terrible regime. Moskalenko now produced a compilation of Politkovskaya's writings, published two years ago by *Novaya Gazeta*—"For What," it was called—and began to read from her descriptions of Russian war criminals in Chechnya. "Who could have hated Anna for these articles?" Moskalenko asked. "Those who were responsible for what happened." Were Khadzhikurbanov and Ryaguzov involved in her murder? "At the very least, their view of the world in no way contradicted the view of Anna taken by the authorities." Of Khadzhikurbanov and Ryaguzov's alleged beating of the travel agent, she said, "I cannot accuse a person without first accusing the system that conditioned him to think that it was acceptable to do these things." And this was the essential problem with the case—what Sergei Sokolov called "the total interdependence of the criminal world and the system of law enforcement." If you believe the cell-phone records furnished by the authorities, why not believe their testimony? They had photographs of the people following Politkovskaya; those people were nowhere to be found. The defendants in the dock were like the one per cent of cases that get acquittals in bench trials in Russia: they were the ones the authorities could spare.

Most of the defendants spoke briefly in their final statements. Khadzhikurbanov, who had in the wake of Moskalenko's speech fallen into a state of deep petulance, thanked the jury for spending its time "looking at a monster like me." But in Ryaguzov, the F.S.B. agent, one sensed some of the underlying ideological realities surrounding the trial. He thanked everyone for coming. He thanked the jury: "You have been plunged into the passions of real life, not a TV show. Whether you like it or not, you will leave parts of your souls here." He thanked the side of the victims for its courage. He thanked the Judge for being a model of impartiality. He thanked the defense, of course, and he even thanked the prosecution—"who was just carrying out orders, like I used to do." Ryaguzov had spent three months working on crossword puzzles. It turned out, at the end, that we were all just visitors at his place.

He had earned the right of home court because he'd defended us all in the war on terror: "Yes, it's true, we went to some restaurants, we drank coffee, sometimes we drank vodka. But no one remembers that for half a year we drank vodka out of aluminum cups and ate food out of cans.

"People have spent a lot of time here talking about some network of agents," he went on. "In all the world, and in all time, no one has invented a way of procuring intelligence, and counter-intelligence, other than through such a network. People know all about the terrible terrorist attacks that happened in our country. They don't know anything about the terrorist attacks that didn't happen—on the sixtieth anniversary of Victory Day, for one. Not long ago, we were afraid to go into our entryways, or when we saw a backpack on the subway. It's not like that anymore. Do you think that happened by itself? It didn't. As for my wishes, I have just one. Next week is February 23rd, and everyone is going to go home, sit down, and raise a glass to the defenders of the fatherland. Spare a thought for us."

The courtroom was momentarily silent. Ryaguzov told the truth: even amid the financial crisis, Russia is a safer, more prosperous place than it was ten, or even five, years ago. The war in Chechnya is over, even as its aftershocks, in the form of the mutant regime of Ramzan Kadyrov, continue. And in the new Russia if you mind your own business, drive to and from work, hire a babysitter, and eat out—all as they do in the West, it is said—then you really can feel safe entering and exiting your entryway at four in the morning and four in the afternoon.



"*When it's over, I'll explain all the pop-culture references you didn't get and you can explain all the pop-culture references I didn't get.*"

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The jury took less than two hours to bring back a unanimous verdict of not guilty on the counts relating to the Politkovskaya killing, and, more surprisingly, not-guilty verdicts for Khadzhikurbanov and Ryaguzov on the travel-agent case. (The prosecution has exercised its right to appeal the verdict.) Ilya Politkovsky stood stonily as Dzhabrail and Ibragim were released from the cage. Dzhabrail came over and put out his hand. Reluctantly, Ilya took it. He listened to Dzhabrail express condolences for his loss and then merely said, "Congratulations." He said the same to the boys' mother. He continued to believe that the Makhmudovs knew something, even if, whatever they were doing whenever they were doing it, they hadn't meant any harm.

That evening, I took the subway to Politkovskaya's old neighborhood. Her doorway is the last one before a pleasant residential area turns into a business district that's under radical reconstruction. Four fifteen-story office buildings are in varying stages of completion right across the street; next to them, recently opened, is a ten-story Holiday Inn. The sidewalk has been torn up and replaced by wooden planks and a corrugated metal roof. The green Lada wouldn't be able to park around the corner now, because a construction median occupies the middle lane and an aboveground pipe runs along the street. There is a new entrance to the subway station, not two hundred feet from her house. And one more addition. Like the many plaques throughout the city, explaining that Pushkin or Bulgakov or Lenin lived or spoke at this address, there is a plaque next to Politkovskaya's doorway. It reads, "In this building lived, and was cruelly murdered on October 7, 2006, ANNA POLITKOVSKAYA."

On the day of the verdict, the courthouse was besieged by video cameras. When Karinna Moskalenko came outside, she began to address them, twenty microphones gathered in a great bunch like flowers before her. "Sit!" someone called to the microphone holders, and on command they crouched down so that the cameras behind them had a view. Moskalenko thanked the international press for paying attention to the killing and the trial; she pleaded with them to continue to pay attention; the real killers hadn't been caught, she said, much less put on trial, and the press and civil society had a responsibility to keep up the pressure. It was Moskalenko's moment. "I've dreamed my whole life as a lawyer of a trial like this," she had told me the day before. "The openness to the press, the adversarial process, before a jury, a judge who lets the sides express their opinions." She didn't want it to end. Her next case would be another trial of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, and that one would be rigged. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

Audio: A conversation with Keith Gessen.

THE SPORTING SCENE

SPIN RIGHT AND SHOOT LEFT

The shot, the stop, the outlet pass will have taken as much as two seconds.

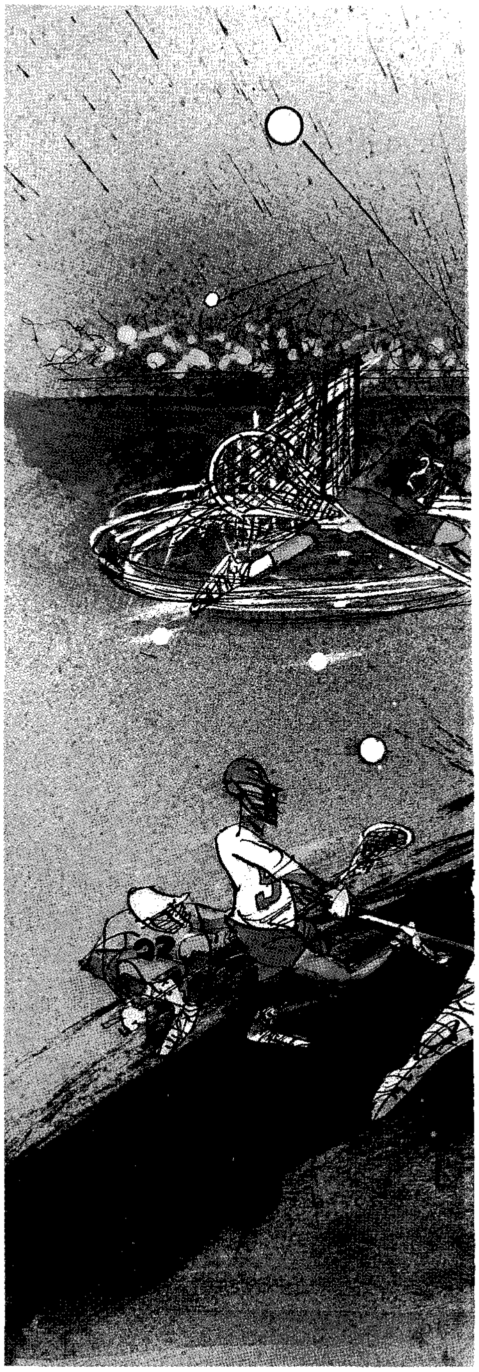
BY JOHN McPHEE

You're on defense, zone defense. You pick up a loose ball and look for the outlet pass. You see it, throw it, and go down the middle on a fast break, taking the return pass. Now you're looking for a three-on-two or a two-on-one before they can set up their defense. Too late, they're settled—man-to-man. You're still looking for a two-on-one, but it's more complicated. You see and sense everybody—where they are, where they're headed, as things develop in almost constant motion. You watch for a backdoor cut, and for someone posting up. Maybe go for an outside shot. The coach is yelling his mantra, "Look for the open man!" There is no open man. Wary of a double-team, you give up the ball with a bounce pass. One player to the next, the ball moves two, three, four times before you set a pick, roll, take a no-look pass, and go to the hoop for a layup. Are you playing basketball? No.

You could be, of course, every term and move alike. But this is lacrosse, which is essentially the same game—an assertion that loses a good deal of its novelty in the light of the fact that James Naismith, best known for inventing basketball, in 1891, and writing and publishing basketball's original rules, in 1892, was a lacrosse player. A Canadian, he had played lacrosse in the eighteen-eighties at McGill, and also for the New York Lacrosse Club.

Lacrosse and basketball are siblings of soccer, hockey, and water polo. When the rules of ice hockey were written, in the eighteen-seventies, a model they followed was lacrosse. The transfer of lacrosse from Iroquoian to European culture had occurred in Montreal in mid-century, and while the white sport was to emigrate and develop most emphatically in the eastern United States, Canadians would retain it strongly here and there—"here" being southeastern Ontario, "there" consisting of some great leaps over territory unfamiliar in the game. Paul and Gary Gait, twins who played for Syracuse (1987-90) and who constitute in themselves a hall of fame within the Hall of Fame, grew up in Victoria, British Columbia, a hotbed of lacrosse. David Mitchell, Cornell '07, a prestidigitational stickhandler who plays in both professional lacrosse leagues (indoor and outdoor), grew up and went to high school in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. Wayne Gretzky, ice hockey's historically greatest star, grew up in Brantford, Ontario. As winters wore on, Gretzky has said, "I could hardly wait to get my lacrosse stick out and start throwing the ball around. It didn't matter how cold or rainy it would be, we'd be out firing the ball against walls and working on our moves."

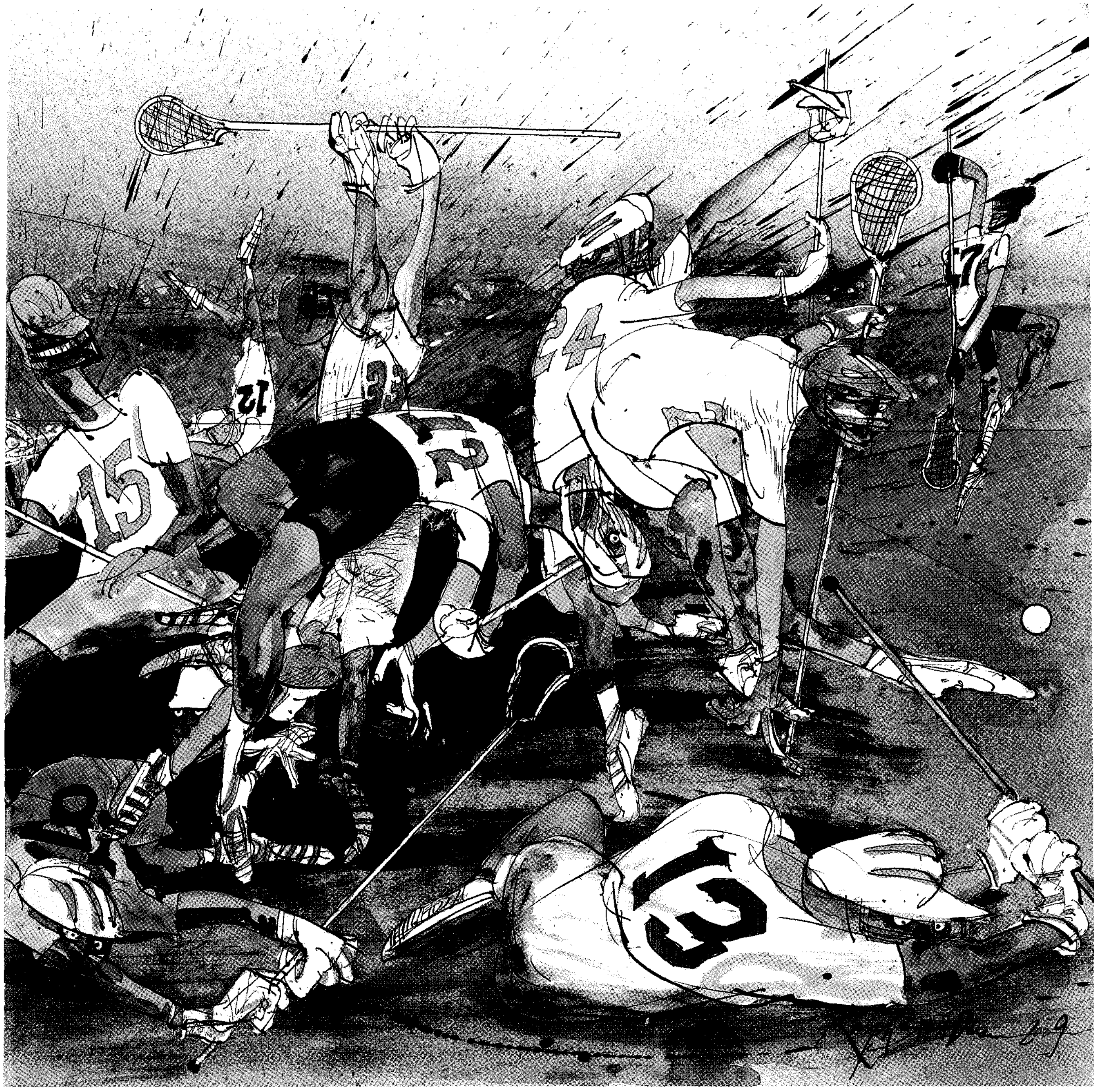
In lacrosse as in hockey, Gretzky was at home in the power play, also known as "man-up" and "e.m.o."—the extra-man opportunity that results when somebody is sent out of the game for a time as a result of a violation, such as "slashing," an unambiguous term common to hockey and lacrosse. Hockey's power play is still a bit rough-hewn—for example, one player, in close, acting as a screen, the others stitching around him a silhouette of slap shots—and in evolutionary terms has not progressed nearly as far as the fast-weaving passes of lacrosse, which gradually tease apart an open man. Water polo—whose fakes and shots will translate into the other games—uses the e.m.o. to punish various torts, like taking your opponent to the bottom of the pool. In lacrosse, advancing the ball from one end of the field to the other is known as clearing, and the defensive attempt to stop the clear is known as riding. Soccer coaches have said that soccer consists of lacrosse's clearing and riding. The basketball term for riding is "full-court press." The most difficult pass in lacrosse traverses the field from one side to the other while both players are running. Soccer calls that square ball. Of these five games—with their picks and screens, their fast breaks and rotational defenses, their high degree of continuous motion—water polo, in its sluggish medium, is surely the most awkward, and lacrosse, at the other extreme, creates the fastest and crispest accumulation of passes and is the prettiest to watch.



A lacrosse stick is a rigid slingshot. Americ

RALPH STEADMAN

Four of these sports are played in the Olympics. The other is lacrosse. There is a Bulgarian Lacrosse Federation, a Korean Lacrosse Association, a Deutscher Lacrosse Verband, an Österreichischer Lacrosse Verband, a Nederlandse La-



ddlers learn to handle lacrosse sticks in certain locations more than in others—notably, in Baltimore.

crosse Bond, a Suomen Lacrosseliitto ry, Lacrosse Polska, Schweiz Lacrosse, and similar organizations in Spain, Hong Kong, Latvia, Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, Canada, Sweden, Denmark, Bermuda, Scotland, Ireland, England, Italy, Slovakia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic. A few years ago, the Princeton lacrosse team finished its season by touring Japan, because there were fifteen thousand lacrosse players in Japan. To the Japanese, a visiting Division I American lacrosse team was an educational opportunity. Near the end of the visit, Princeton was asked to play, against assorted Japanese teams, eight complete lacrosse games in one day. Bill Tierney, Princeton's coach, was uncharacteristically at a loss for words. Like American football teams, lacrosse teams usually play once a week and need the time to recover. Holding up a pair of fingers, Tierney said, "Two."

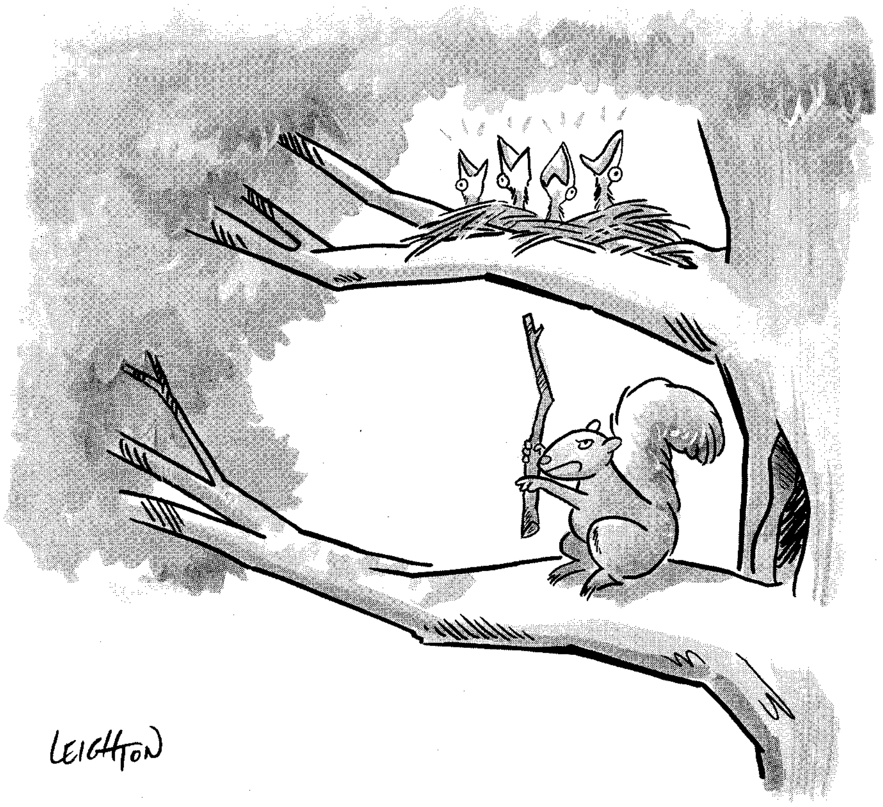
As lacrosse has spread to the Far East, the Far East has entered the cerebral cortex of lacrosse. Dave Pietramala, the head coach at the Johns Hopkins University, has studied Sun Tzu on military strategy. Sun Tzu dates from twenty-five centuries ago, in the time of Aristotle and Alexander the Great. After reading Sun Tzu on deception ("All warfare is based on deception"), Pietramala looked more favorably than ever on the Hopkins defensive fake slide. Like his ancient mentor, Pietramala preaches patience. Sun Tzu: "If it is to your advantage to make a forward move, make a forward move; if not, stay where you are." Hopkins has won nine N.C.A.A. championships since the N.C.A.A. began its tournaments, in 1971. (Before then, national champions were declared.) Pietramala achieved his first in 2005. In 1928, in a premature attempt to sell lacrosse to the Olympics, Major General Douglas MacArthur, the president of the American Olympic Committee, organized a lacrosse tournament to determine what American team would demonstrate lacrosse in matches against Great Britain and Canada at the summer Games in Amsterdam. Hopkins defeated Maryland for the honor.

The International Federation of Women's Lacrosse Associations has held a World Cup tournament every four years since 1982. The first was in Nottingham. The most recent one was in Annapolis, Maryland (Australia 14, U.S. 7), and the next one is in Prague. Men's World Lacrosse Championships have been held every four years since 1974, most recently in London, Ontario, where Team U.S.A., which had won the tournament seven of nine times, got past the Iroquois, 21–13, but lost in the final to Canada. The populationally outnumbered Iroquois hold their own in these tournaments, usually finishing well up in the column. They do not seek membership in the Indian National Lacrosse Federation. At a bar in Dublin late last spring, a manager of the English national men's lacrosse team remarked that some Iroquois have two sets of sticks, modern ones and old "woodies," "and man do they hurt when they check with them." He said, "They really do hold their own as a lacrosse nation." In 2006, after narrowly beating England, "they took the Australians apart; they bring something special to every World Championship—they are the life and soul of our sport."

I was in Dublin with the Princeton men's lacrosse team, of which I am a Faculty Fellow (an official position, not unlike shaman, that was thought up some years ago by the university's athletic director, Gary Walters, who can think up just about anything). Earlier, we had been in southeastern Spain, near Cartagena, at a high-rent sporting club called La Manga, where Spanish Open golf tournaments have been played, where a tennis stadium is surrounded by twenty-seven outside courts, and where a spread of cricket pitches and no fewer than eight state-of-the-art soccer fields have attracted cricketers and footballers of the highest level. Manchester United warms up there. Princeton—scheduled to play two games on consecutive days against the English national lacrosse team—arrived on the eve of the first match after a long bus ride to J.F.K. that included streets of midtown Manhattan, a night flight to Dublin, a 6 A.M. departure for Alicante, which is as close to Dublin as New York is to Minneapolis, and, finally, an hour's bus ride from Alicante to La Manga, where the team arrived with ample time to change into their uniforms, get into other buses, and ride to a field to practice. Goals, grass, sidelines, restraining boxes, end lines, creases—everything was perfect, and perfectly marked. Bill Tierney ran his team for two hours. They didn't seem at all sleepless, and he finished them off with wind sprints. Then he called them together for a word: This was no Roman holiday; these were games of importance to international lacrosse, and they were to play with finesse, not flash, proving how well they could play, not how showily. Looking around, he didn't need to add: No behind-the-back passes, no behind-the-back hot-dog shots at the English goalie. Since they apparently thought sleep was what other people do, he told them to make curfew, and he would be around to see that they did. "Give this team a good game," he said. "They have better sticks than we do."

What that meant was that the English would pass, catch, shoot, scoop, and cradle with more stickhandling skill than their American opponents. Really? Really. In the first game, an English midfielder, sprinting up his left sideline to take a pass on a clear, looked over his shoulder and saw that the ball was headed wide, low, and out of bounds. Without breaking stride, and keeping his feet always inches inbounds, he extended his left arm and lacrosse stick far over the sideline, lowered the head almost to the ground, and turned the pocket backward. Seven feet from the player's shoulder, six inches above the ground, the ball went into the pocket, then, still running full tilt, the English midfielder flipped the head of the stick and brought it up into shooting position as he veered toward the Princeton goal.

A lacrosse stick is a rigid slingshot. American toddlers learn to handle lacrosse sticks in certain locations more than in others—notably, in Baltimore. Manchester has been called "the Baltimore of English lacrosse." The Mancunian press has called Baltimore the Manchester of the United States. That English midfielder was a Mancunian. Some seventy-five per cent of English lacrosse players are natives of Greater Manchester. Men's world championships have been



and will be held in Manchester (2010). In the eighteen-nineties, at the British lacrosse championship, a Mancunian donated a trophy for the winner, calling it the Iroquois Cup.

After the lacrosse games in Spain and a third game a few days later against England in Ireland—after the Princeton players got into their buses and went back to their rooms—Bill Tierney stayed on, at the request of the English nationals, to conduct clinics for the English players. It being his opinion that they were long on stick-handling and short on strategy, he told them that they expended too much energy "running east-west and not enough running north-south." He told them he was "seeing a lot of green down the middle, down that alley," and they were not taking advantage of it. "When you dodge and run, head to the far pipe. Going for the far corner of the pipe is a mental idea." He talked volubly, rapidly, with the absence of hesitation of someone completely grounded in his subject, and he showed no concern for his American accent; he was speaking lacrosse. If he mentioned isos, they understood that he meant isododging—one against one. "North-south" is parallel to sidelines, "east-west" is parallel to end lines. You don't accomplish much running east-west; you attack by running north-south.

"The guy who makes the play is often not the guy who got the assist or the goal. It starts two or three passes earlier. We all get the goal."

"Lacrosse is essentially a matter of looking for a two-on-one. You get it by dodging, passing, or picking."

"If you hear the word 'switch,' put your shoulder in it and go for the goal."

"Get outside your comfort zone—go left."

"Number 40, you used your shot fake enough times to make it ineffective. Use it when it counts."

Tierney himself seemed to have been trained in some sort of diplomatic clinic. He had many genuine compliments for the English players, seasoned with deprecations of his own players (who weren't there). On the craft of scoring, he said, "You shoot to the opposite knee." On the art of precision shooting, he said, "If my guys could hit the corners, I would tell them to shoot there. But I tell them to shoot for the knees or the shoulders. Then they'll hit the corners." (He has had players who could hit a falling leaf.)

"If you shoot from square, you can't get everything on it that you want." (When you shoot from square, a line drawn between your feet would be perpendicular to the direction of your shot.)

"Do your inside roll. Feel the pressure of the defense."

"Do the rocker step, come back up top."

"Split hard to his top foot." (Make your dodge and pass the defender on the side where his foot is more advanced.)

"That's about as far as you are going to get to go before they double you."

Setting up drill lines for two-on-twos, he taught them a pick-and-roll variation that he called Kodiak, because Princeton invented it for a game against Brown. It was reminiscent of the confined space, tight maneuvering, and superb stickhandling of Iroquois and Canadian indoor lacrosse, transposed by Tierney to the outdoor game. Occurring topside (in front of the goal), it could result in various achievements, such as causing a long-stick defenseman (a "pole") to be replaced by a defender with a short stick, or producing a maneuver resulting in a score: set the pick, and after the roll "make that little Kodiak-type pass, over the shoulder."

Both figuratively and literally, the most exploitable dimension in the game of lacrosse is the more than eight thousand square feet of playing space behind each goal, the focus of which is an area known as X. Tierney mentioned various dodges crafted for coming out of X, the simplest of which was pure speed—the "speed dodge," the "rush dodge," the "bull dodge."

"You just sprint to get topside. Gauge your defenseman. If he can't run with you, you're going to beat him all day." (Defensemen, who were once burly and slow, have become burly and fast—or especially adroit at changing direction.) "Don't run curving routes. Make sure that whatever you can do is in straight lines. Sprint to seven and seven." The numbers refer to a topside locale called the island—seven yards wide of the goal and seven yards in front of it. What to do on the island? "You have four options: Turn and shoot with your opposite hand; for example, spin right and shoot left-handed. Split and go under. Plant, and inside roll. Rocker step, then shoot from topside." The English faces suggested nothing short of complete comprehension until Tierney added, "Five and five is what you really want when you say seven and seven. It's like saying the curfew is at 1 A.M. and they get in at three."

In Dublin, most went to the Guinness brewery, some visited the Book of Kells, and I missed the bus to the lacrosse game. One moment, two buses were waiting—at Jurys Inn Christchurch—and the lobby was a sea of orange-and-black equipment bags and uniformed players. I went up to my room for something I had forgotten, and when I returned the lobby was vacant and the buses were gone. I had nothing on paper that said where the game was to be, and I don't text-message anybody. The *Irish Times* did not know where the game was. The *Irish Times* does not know lacrosse from camogie or hurling. I went to the front desk and asked the clerk where the buses had gone. She was an intern from China, and she did not understand me. She said this was her first full day in Ireland. I asked a male clerk. No comprehension (Bucharest). I consulted my cash position. Two euros. But money was the least of my problems; I knew nowhere to go.

Into the rising panic, three remembered letters came forward from who knows where—initials detached from the context in which they had been spoken: "U," "C," "D." I went out onto Christchurch Place and asked someone where I might find the nearest A.T.M.

In the smoke shop past the corner.

I ran to the smoke shop past the corner. The A.T.M. was down. I kept going, along Lord Edward Street, toward Dublin Castle. In a stone wall I found an A.T.M. The wall was stuffed with euros. What seemed like blocks later, I reached the Dame Street Taxi Rank, near Trinity College. To a kindly, graying driver, I said, "U.C.D." And where would I be going at U.C.D.? he asked. It's a great sprawling place, more than three hundred acres, and lying several miles from the city center.

"I don't know. I missed a bus. I'm supposed to be at a lacrosse match. Can you help me?"

It was a long ride, but not nearly long enough for the conversation that developed. At the first stoplight, he said, "And what might lacrosse be?"

I said it was football, basketball, and ice hockey in an advanced stage of evolution. It was played with a solid rubber ball weighing a third of a pound and carried in a small basket at the end of a stick. If you grasped it like a hockey stick (hands apart) or even like a baseball bat (hands together) and swung it with full leverage, you could throw a lacrosse ball more than a hundred miles an hour. You could kill somebody. So players wear genital cups, pads, helmets, face masks. The idea is to throw the ball past a keeper into a netted goal.

How does a match begin? Does it begin like football?

It's like nothing you ever saw.

The ball is set on the ground at the center of the field. Close over it, two men face each other. The referee says, "Down!," as if he were addressing mastiffs. They go into deep knee squats with their stick heads back to back, inches apart but not touching the ball. After the referee blows a whistle, the face-off men grunt against each other and attempt by various maneuvers to gain possession of the ball. The face-off in women's lacrosse is more scenic. There is nothing collisional about women's lacrosse—no contact. The ball, held at shoulder height between the two opposing sticks, is flung upward as if on the jet of a fountain. Players converge from all directions and someone gains possession. Tribal face-offs were once quite similar to women's face-offs today. To begin a lacrosse game, Iroquois teams of the eighteenth century formed facing parallel lines, and a beautiful maiden (according to Samuel Woodruff, of Windsor, Ontario, writing in 1797) put the ball down on the field. Players from each team went to the ball "and with united bats raised it from the ground to such an elevation as gave a chance for a fair stroke."

In an ice-hockey face-off, the referee throws the puck down between two players and they fight it out. When my father, who was born in 1895, played basketball in high school and college, the referees tossed the ball into the air between two players after every score, and also at the start of each period. Basketball's face-off is known as the tip-off, and now, in college play, you see it only as it starts a game or in overtime. In lacrosse there is no more important play. After a score, the scored-upon team is not simply awarded the ball. It has to fight for it in a face-off, and teams that are good at facing off can score multiple consecutive goals while the other team, again and again, fails to gain possession of the ball. Because lacrosse substitutions are unlimited, many face-off players have become so specialized that they are known as FOGOs: Face Off, Get Off, to be replaced by a midfielder more skillful at attacking or defending. In the words of the professional midfielder Matt Striebel, of the Philadelphia Barrage, "The FOGO has become one of the most highly sought-after positions in lacrosse, the object of intense recruiting. It is the most important position on the field, besides goaltending. A great FOGO is like a great place-kicker."

A FOGO's repertory includes but is not limited to the basic clamp, the pinch clamp, the rake, the jam, the plunger. Some FOGOs hold their sticks with the motorcycle grip (both palms down), the better to roll the head and clamp the ball. Danny Brennan, of Syracuse, the 2008 N.C.A.A. champions, has said that the pinch clamp was his best move: "I try and suck my stick down low and beat his clamp. I use it a lot." A great general athlete is not going to be intimidated by a FOGO. The midfielder Kyle Harrison, of Johns Hopkins's 2005 national champions and now a professional with the Denver Outlaws, told *Inside Lacrosse* magazine, "FOGOs are almost always very quick to the ball. So instead of trying to beat him to the ball, I forget the ball and focus on crushing the head of his stick with the shaft of my stick between my hands. Notice how I've slammed the shaft of my stick into the top part of the scoop of his stick. If I hit my shaft into the right part of his head, he's got no chance of stopping his head from spinning in his hands. So once I've pushed his head away from the ball I can use the shaft of my stick to pop the ball behind me where I can cut him off and get to the GB first. Just remember when you do this move do it hard and fast and relentlessly. There's no room for nice guys on face-offs." A GB is a ground ball. In 1888, Princeton's face-off man was Edgar Allan Poe. His granduncle (ibid.) wrote "The Raven."

As in the sibling sports, once you have the ball the idea is to free up someone, or free up yourself, to shoot—by picking and rolling, by dodging half a dozen ways, and even by resurrecting basketball's old-time weave (Hopkins's spaghetti offense). A ball

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THE FOUNDATION

1.
Watch me, I'm running, watch me, I'm dancing, I'm air;
the building I used to live in has been razed and I'm skipping,
hopping, two-footedly leaping across the blocks, bricks,
slabs of concrete, plaster, and other unnameable junk . . .

Or nameable, really, if you look at the wreckage closely . . .
Here, for instance, this shattered I-beam is the Bible,
and this chunk of mortar? Plato, the mortar of mind,
also in pieces, in pieces in me, anyway, in my mind . . .

Aristotle and Nietzsche, Freud and Camus and Buber,
and Christ, even, that year of reading "Paradise Lost,"
when I thought, Hell, why not? but that fractured, too . . .
Kierkegaard, Hegel, and Kant, and Goffman and Marx,

all heaped in the foundation, and I've sped through so often
that now I have it by heart, can run, dance, be air,
not think of the spew of intellectual dust I scuffed up
when in my barely broken-in boots I first clumped through

the sanctums of Buddhism, Taoism, Zen, and the Areopagite,
even, whose entire text I typed out—my god, why?—
I didn't care, I just kept bumping my head on the lintels,
Einstein, the Gnostics, Kabbalah, Saint This and Saint That . . .

2.
Watch me again now, because I'm not alone in my dancing,
my being air, I'm with my poets, my Rilke, my Yeats,
we're leaping together through the debris, a jumble of wrack,
but my Keats floats across it, my Herbert and Donne,

my Kinnell, my Bishop and Blake are soaring across it,
my Frost, Baudelaire, my Dickinson, Lowell and Larkin,
and my giants, my Whitman, my Shakespeare, my Dante
and Homer; they were the steel, though scouring as I was

the savants and sages half the time I hardly knew it . . .
But Vallejo was there all along, and my Sidney and Shelley,
my Coleridge and Hopkins, there all along with their music,
which is why I can whirl through the rubble of everything else,

the philosophizing and theories, the thesis and anti- and syn-,
all I believed must be what meanings were made of,
when really it was the singing, the choiring, the cadence,
the lull of the vowels, the chromatical consonant clatter . . .

Watch me again, I haven't landed, I'm hovering here
over the fragments, the remnants, the splinters and shards;
my poets are with me, my soarers, my skimmers, my skaters,
aloft on their song in the ruins, their jubilant song of the ruins.

—C. K. Williams

thrown with such power that it does not even begin to curve toward the ground is called—as in baseball—a frozen rope. The N.R.A. would call it a round. As it passes above one or the other of the goalie's shoulders, he might not notice it. The lacrosse goal is vastly smaller than a soccer goal, of course, but—like a basketball hoop—it is larger than it seems to be. The apparent degree of difficulty of a parabolic basketball shot is diminished by the knowledge that the diameter of the hoop is nearly twice the diameter of the ball, which, as it drops in and begins to swish, occupies scarcely twenty-seven per cent of the targeted area. The lacrosse goalie defends a square plane, six feet on a side, framed by metal pipes. The surface area occluded by a goalie's body and the head of his stick is twenty-five per cent of the goal plane, give or take some fat. That leaves seventy-five per cent of a goal open at all times. A shooter has twenty-seven square feet always open, if not always in the same place.

Shooters aim for the lower corners, the upper corners, and the "5 hole" (between the goalie's legs). Good scorers can catch and shoot in a single motion. Good feeders make that possible. If an attacking player with his back to the goal takes a high feed and in one continuing windmill motion brings the head of his stick down past his knees and fires a shot into the net behind him, he has done a Canadian egg roll. An elevator is a shot that starts low and ends high. A wormburner is a shot that is low all the way. A bounce shot can be hard to stop, especially if it has sidespin on it. Bill Tierney complains that his Princeton players resist learning to put sidespin on a shot. (There have been exceptional exceptions.) Sidearm, sidespinning shots bounce higher, even past a goalie's shoulder. When a shot misses the goal and goes all the way over the end line, the ball is given to the player—attacker or defender—who was nearest the ball as it went out of bounds. In Tierney's words, "It's the only game in which if you miss the goal you get the ball back."

Goalies bait shooters. Goalies stand way over against one pipe and wait for some sucker to shoot into all that empty space—which has just been filled by the anticipating goalie. A shot that is fired straight into the pocket of a goalie's stick is a gumball. It is also called popcorn. The shooter should stay after practice and practice shooting. Goalies are so quick that they can sometimes "stuff" a point-blank shooter. An unguarded shot from three feet out can be caught by a goalie. Most shots, of course, come from greater distances, and when the goalie has the ball in his stick his eyes go back immediately to the source of the shot, because the goalie's teammate who was guarding the shooter will have turned upfield and is the first choice to receive the outlet pass. The shot, the stop, the outlet pass—the complete reversal of direction—will have taken as much as two seconds.

Of course, I didn't blurt out all this right there in that Dublin taxi—only the essence of it, of ninety per cent of it, in response to the driver's questions, which came one upon another and suggested a lifetime of attention to sporting games no matter how outlandish they might be. After we had been through Ranelagh and were just passing Royal Hospital Donnybrook, he asked if I had ever played lacrosse myself.

Once, I told him, but only for a season, at Deerfield Academy, in western Massachusetts—a postgraduate year between high school and college, my mother's map of a route to maturity. I played basketball, compensating with quickness for a grave lack of height, and after a close and raucous game one Saturday night a teacher came through the departing crowd, stopped me on my way to the locker room, and said his name was Mr. Haviland, and that he was the coach of Deerfield lacrosse. He said come spring he would like me to try out for his team.

I might have been less surprised if he had asked me for a tip on the third at Gulfstream Park. In any case, that dialogue at courtside with him seems impossible, but this was 1949, when, nationally, about one-hundredth of one per cent of the population of the United States had ever heard of lacrosse, and five-thousandths of one per cent had ever played it. There had been no lacrosse at my high school, or, as far as I knew, at any other public high school in New Jersey. Besides, I had been on the high-school tennis team. I told Mr. Haviland that I had fiddled around with lacrosse sticks maybe ten times ever while I was growing up in Princeton, but I didn't play lacrosse, did not know how to play lacrosse.

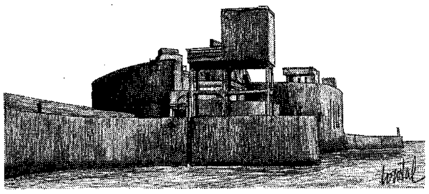
His response was that I had just been playing it, in a sense, and that I could learn fairly quickly to play in the midfield, where defense would be much the same, and I could also learn quickly to scoop up a loose ball, after which my job would be to carry it to the other end of the field and throw it to a teammate who knew what he was doing. He said he thought I could be a real hoover, a ground-ball machine, and he would teach me the Baltimore crab (a twisting scoop on the dead run, also known as the Indian pickup). He said if I didn't learn to cradle well (create centrifugal force to keep the ball in my stick) I could hold the stick straight out in front of me, pocket up, ball inside it, as I sprinted up the field (a move known as walking the dog). "All you need to be is inn-terr-esst-edd," he said. I would before long be aware that the word "interested," pronounced in four discrete syllables with the accent on the "esst," was not only a criterion statement of what a player had to be but also the highest compliment Mr. Haviland had to give.

All through spring vacation, I threw lacrosse balls at anything that would send them bouncing back to me. Some things didn't. They broke. On the high-school level in New England at that time, there was so little lacrosse that we had on our ten-game schedule only four high-school teams, and one of them—Manhasset—was from Long Island. The three others were Mount Hermon, Phillips Andover, and Phillips Exeter. Lacrosse had been played at Andover and Exeter in the eighteen-eighties but was not really established at either school until the nineteen-thirties. Andover's first modern coach was renowned for dancing nude in his living room while accompanying himself on the violin. Deerfield 10, Andover 6.

Absent other secondary schools to schedule, we played the junior-varsity team of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, the freshman lacrosse teams of Yale, Harvard, Dartmouth, and Williams, and, at West Point, the U.S. Military Academy plebes. Everybody was interested, one syllable at a time, and we won all those games. We were undefeated. We beat the plebes, 10–9, on the Plain. We beat Manhasset, 17–3, a scant six months before the unstoppable Jimmy Brown—by long-time consensus the greatest lacrosse player in the modern game—entered Manhasset High School as a freshman. Phew!

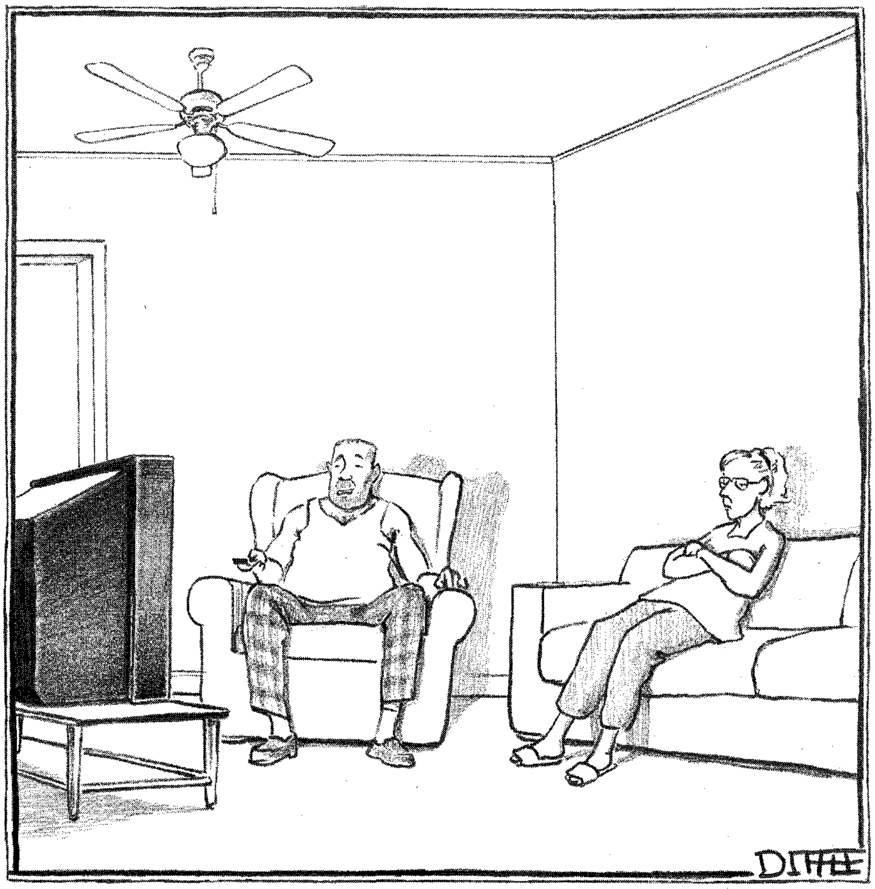
Jimmy Brown was born on St. Simons Island, off mainland Georgia. From the age of eight, he grew up on Long Island, where his mother worked as a domestic servant. At Syracuse University in the nineteen-fifties, he became, yes, the greatest football player in the school's history (on his way to becoming the greatest running back in the history of the National Football League), but he was not, in the usual manner, a football player who played lacrosse. He was a lacrosse player who played football. He loved lacrosse, called it his favorite sport. "Lacrosse is probably the best sport I ever played. . . . I could express myself fully in lacrosse. I could run two hundred yards at a stretch. I could duck between players. I could feel free to make the plays that suited me best. It wasn't like football or basketball, where coaches tell you what foot to put down." He had grown up in lacrosse—Manhasset High School '53. He was not a massive defenseman with a long stick killing intruders. He was a massive midfielder with a four-foot stick that looked a lot shorter in his hands. Cradling with one wrist, he would lower his left shoulder, and—in various versions—say, "Look out! I'm coming through." Bob Scott, the head coach at Hopkins then and for twenty years, remembers Jimmy Brown as "a man playing with boys." Scott continues, "He weighed two-twenty-eight. Holy mackerel! The thighs were huge. I don't think anybody would try to take Jimmy Brown. Mt. Washington guys threw body checks at him—at a brick wall. You couldn't double-team him. He'd just go through it. He just went by people and fired it in the goal. He startled the lacrosse world, he was so good."

Our sticks were fashioned like shepherd's crooks from steamed and bent hickory. For every team then playing the game, they were made almost exclusively by the Iroquois. Where sticks were available from sporting-goods companies, they had been bought wholesale, primarily from Onondagas and Mohawks, Iroquoian tribes. The Iroquois made tens of thousands of sticks a year, each stick requiring about a year to cure, steam, bend, and string. It was not a particularly expandable industry. On average, the lower trunk of one good hickory yielded eight sticks, and this tended not only to affect the oak-hickory ratios in climax forests of northeastern America but also to limit the growth of the game. Sticks were idiosyncratic, as different as thumbprints. It was said that certain high-level lacrosse teams had the best sticks because the coaches had curried favor with the Indians. The pocket was shaped from woven stiff rawhide and leather thongs. As a result, the ball was harder to handle than it is now and spent more time loose on the ground.



Ask a modern player what he has in his hands, and, typically, he might say, "Cyber head on a black Swizzle Scandium." Next player: "A Penitrator head on a Gait Anarchy shaft." Next: "An Evolution 2.0 on a Kryptolyte shaft." Shafts are made of patented aluminum alloys, of graphite, of vanadium, of zirconium, of weapons-grade titanium. The teardrop heads are plastic and are bilaterally symmetrical (forget the shepherd's crook). The heads fit snugly and are secured with a screw. The revolution from wood to plastic took place in the nineteen-seventies, in a factory in Boston and another in Baltimore owned by a lacrosse all-American who had carried a wooden stick. The event is sometimes called the plasticization of lacrosse. It changed the game to the same great extent that pole-vaulting was changed when fibreglass replaced bamboo. With the new stick, a lacrosse player could do a great many things more surely, rapidly, and precisely—shoot, pass, pick up a loose ball, cradle to protect it. The fastest of running games became even faster, and even prettier to watch.

The custom stringing of tennis racquets is abecedarian compared with the subtleties that have developed in the stringing of lacrosse sticks. Nobody over nine uses a factory pocket, or so it seems. Some players carry around with them as many as seven heads. They bake their heads and reshape them. They carry different heads for different weather, because moisture changes the webbing. The "traditional pocket" of woven thongs is still in use, but more than ninety per cent of players go for nylon mesh, woven in various geometries, for the most part in vertical or horizontal diamonds. The ball rides in a pocket of



"Here's something called 'The Fifty Greatest Countdown Shows Ever!'"

• •

assorted legal depths, and when it is thrown it first moves over the mesh toward the top of the stick. In the high and widest part of the mesh—woven in and out, from side to side—are the shooting strings, almost all of them laces made for hockey skates. There the ball trips, backspins, and fires. Out she goes in three digits, if you've got the rhythm and the muscle to make that happen. Lacrosse shops are not unlike fly-fishing shops in the bewildering range of what they have to offer, and players carry the topic forward into preoccupation, cryptoscience, and voodoo. They boil their mesh. They use Jergens lotion on their mesh. They buy pocket pounders and pocket screws that shape the mesh and hold it in place, like blocking a hat. They tune their shooting strings according to the kinds of shots they anticipate making. They tighten a "shooter," loosen one, take one out, thread another in the shape of a U. They string and otherwise shape the pocket to control its softness and legal depth.

This craft is too advanced for most lacrosse players, who turn to "stick doctors" for assistance. Usually, there is at least one on any team. Charlie Kolkin and Alex Capretta are the incumbents at Princeton. Others describe their work as having gemlike characteristics. The University of Virginia has had its lacrosse sticks strung in California, by, so to speak, a plastic surgeon. His name is Lyle Tomlinson and he wore the number 34 when he played the game long ago. His "Pocket 34" is world famous—well, lacrosse-world famous. If a pocket can be called a sack—a real bag—it is deep and soft and will release a ball with a lot of "whip." Ask a lacrosse player how much whip is in his stick and he'll say something like "seven on a scale of ten." The more whip, the faster the shot. The more whip, the more erratic a throw is likely to be. Among other things, whip tends to bend trajectories downward. Bill Tierney is wary of whip. "It can cause bad passes," he explains. "Most mistakes are bad passes—thrown too low, for example, because of the whip in the passer's pocket."

These are things that players have confided to the writers of *Inside Lacrosse:*

> I keep my pocket high in the stick, right under my bottom shooting string. I like a lot of hold at the top so I can take a deep windup when I shoot.
>
> If you're a middie who shoots hard off the dodge or a guy who does most of his damage on set shots, you might want to have a decent amount of whip in your stick. It helps lock the ball in place under the shooting strings so you can really reach back and sling it. . . . If you want a lot of whip, tighten the top shooting string.
>
> My best chance at scoring is by having a huge whip. . . . My theory is that if I don't even know where my shot is going, how the heck is a goalie going to guess where it's going?

Off Stillorgan Road, we turned in at University College Dublin, and the driver got out at a security hut to ask where, if anywhere, at U.C.D. we might find a lacrosse match between England and a team from America. There was no immediate response. Then: "Lacrosse?"

"Lacrosse," the driver affirmed, in a yes-of-course tone, as if suggesting that Cuchulain himself had played the game.

Security made calls on a mobile phone. At length, he seemed vindicated. No one else at U.C.D. knew from lacrosse. The one possibility was a sports ground on the far side of the college, and we would have to drive around the college to find it—about two miles.

So we started off again, the taxi-driver asking how an aboriginal game had acquired in the first place such an unfathomable name.

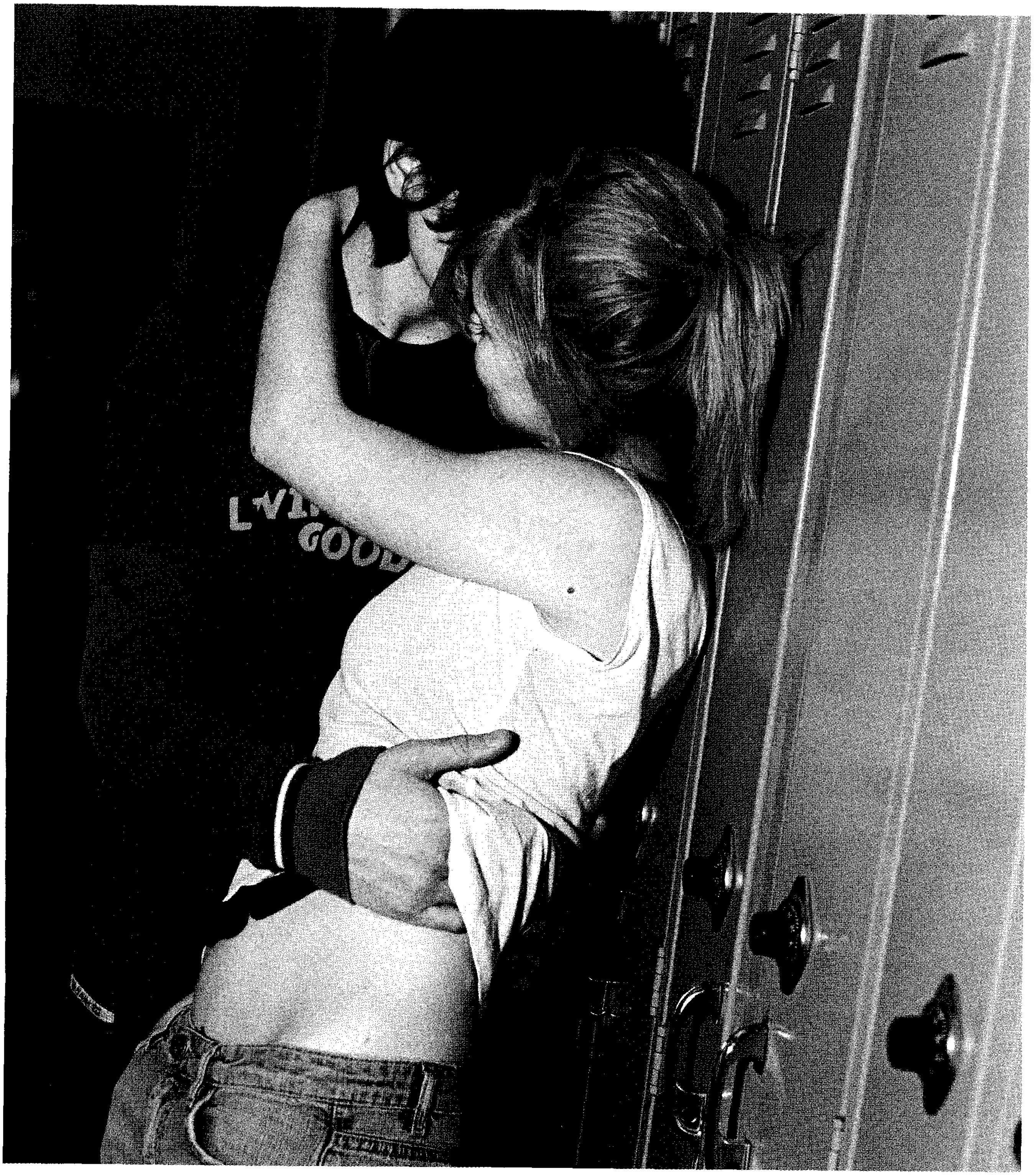
The etymology has a lot of whip. A player's stick is also called a crosse. It is said that when the black robes of the seventeenth century saw the sticks of the Iroquois they thought of ecclesiastical crosiers. In some parts of France, cricket has been called *la crosse.* A game more or less like field hockey developed in France and was also called *le jeu de la crosse.* Prairie La Crosse, where the La Crosse River enters the Mississippi, is where the Winnebagos played, and where La Crosse, Wisconsin, is now.

Off Clonskeagh Road, we turned once again into the college, and a quarter mile later came upon a large parking area—buses, cars—and a fenced pitch covered with lacrosse players in red-and-white and orange-and-black. The driver said he would like to stay and watch. ♦

FICTION

SHE'S THE ONE

BY TESSA HADLEY



The winter after her brother killed himself, Ally got a job at a writers' center near her parents' house, helping out with admin in the office. It wasn't a satisfactory job, only part time and not well paid. She was twenty-two. She had just finished her degree in English literature and should have been building toward some sort of career; she had planned to move to Manchester, where she had been at university. But everything like that had had to be put on hold, while at home her family melted down into a kind of madness. It was a relief just to leave the madness behind and drive across the moors four mornings a week to the center, several miles away. She had the use of a car, because for the moment her mum wasn't going to work.

The moors that winter were often under a crust of snow—not enough to blanket them in white, but a mean, dirty frosting on the hard earth and wilted shrubs. Ally didn't mind the bitter weather. Her guilt at getting out, even for a few hours, would fall away as she drove, leaving the town behind. Sometimes when she parked at the center, crunching into the gravelled space between the kitchen and the high black garden wall, where the stones were mossy and ferns grew in the cracks, she was really all right for a moment. I'm really all right, she would think, carefully, lightly, as she pulled the key from the ignition, trying not to examine the sensation too closely or lose it with any sudden movement, as if it were a thin-filmed shiny bubble poised in her chest.

The center was in a big bleak house built in the early nineteenth century, isolated in a dip in the middle of the moors, beside a river. It had been modernized to suit its new function. A couple of outbuildings, along from the kitchen, had been converted into a studio for writing workshops and an office, homely with the comfortable ticking of computers and photocopier and fax machine. Fluorescent Post-it notes were stuck to the office shelves, reminding the staff of the things that needed doing, the set procedures for each group of students that came and went. Ally quickly mastered these; she was capable and sensible. The organizers of the center, Kit and Sam, were pleased to have her helping out. Also, because Ally had always loved reading, the idea was that she would enjoy meeting the writers who taught there—there would be something in it for her, too.

Ally had got the job through the woman her mum had worked for as a secretary, when she was still at work. This woman was a barrister in employment law, and she was on the board of trustees for the center. In some people, the family's disaster had produced this phenomenon—a crazy energy of organization on their behalf. Ally was grateful for the job, but it made her mother angry: "As usual, she comes barging in, thinking she knows best." Mum was also angry, on the other hand, at their neighbors in the close of ex-council houses, some of whom had been her friends for years but now crept in and out trying to avoid meeting her. Ally appreciated their difficulty. What were they supposed to say, after the first few heartfelt encounters? All ordinary transactions were contaminated: "How are you?" and "How's it going?" and "Nice day." Even "Bloody awful day," which it usually was, would seem to imply an ordinary scale of gloom, which her family was far removed from and couldn't possibly yet find a way back to.

Hilda came to the center for a weeklong fiction-writing course. She was one of those students you learned to pick out at the first encounter as a potential flash point, someone who might easily be offended, or offend others; you treated such students with special consideration, but kept them at arm's length. She was Canadian, probably in her mid-fifties, small, with thick, perfectly white hair chopped off in a crisp line at her shoulders; she was a vegan, and had requested special dietary arrangements in advance. When everyone gathered around the wood stove in the drawing room of the old house for introductions, Hilda chose to sit cross-legged and straight-backed on the floor, her slight neat body supple like a child's. Although she wasn't unfriendly, Ally noticed that she didn't join in with the others' self-deprecation: a touch of impatience snapped in her expression. Yet she obviously suffered when she had to read out her own work. She must have been good-looking when she was younger, with Scandinavian features, wide mouth and hard cheekbones, something raw in her eyes, their hazel irises flecked with darker brown. She fixed the tutors, while they were talking, with a steady, critical, attentive gaze.

Although Ally loved books, she had realized since she began working at the center that she didn't have much interest in knowing how they were written—how characters were developed or plots structured or any of the other things the teachers held forth about and the students soaked up so avidly. All of them, writers and would-be writers, were consumed with a sort of fever over this process of writing and being published; some of the would-bes seemed to hope that by rubbing up close enough against the published ones they might catch something. That week, it was her turn to take the tutors into town for the mid-course lunch. Ann said that she liked Hilda—she'd had an interesting life. But Jim, who was from Glasgow, tall and loose-bodied, with a bald patch like a monk's tonsure, complained that she was wearing him down with her persistence.

"She's stuck to my elbow whenever I look down, asking whether I've read her rewrites yet, or what I think of Robertson Davies. She's so intense."

"Intense isn't a bad thing."

"What's her novel about?" Ally asked.

"In the sixties, she hung around with arty types in some sort of commune. The central character has an affair with a rock star. It ought to be more interesting. How many Canadian rock stars do you know?"

They could think of only Robbie Robertson. They decided that it wasn't him—the character was a singer-songwriter.

"She does this awful folksy thing: he's called the Guitar Player. 'The Guitar Player did this,' 'The Guitar Player did that, stuck a spliff under his strings, sent out his lonely song into the night, across the lake.' Imagine writing about a crowd of egomaniacal hippies doing drugs and it's not funny? Also, there's too much nature in it. One tree will do, as far as I'm concerned. Symbolism. One tree can stand in for the whole caboodle."

Some of the writers who came to tutor the courses were nice, but not all of them were. Some were funny about the students, especially the crazies, the ones who brought the two thousand handwritten pages of their novel in a plastic bag, or

COLLIER SCHORR/ART + COMMERCE

wrote from the perspective of a donkey abused by its owner. These eccentrics might turn out to be geniuses but usually didn't. Ally wasn't disappointed in the writers: she hadn't expected anything from them in the first place; it hadn't occurred to her to be interested in writers as individuals beyond their work. To her relief, no one whose books she'd read ever came to the center, although sometimes she had to pretend to have read the writers who did. The writers could be fairly crazy, too; you had to be vigilant not to trip up over their vanity and anxiety. Luckily, most of her favorites were dead.

At the end of the course, on her evaluation sheet, Hilda made a number of points about how it could have been better organized. Under the question "What was the most important thing you learned in your time here?," she left the space empty. A few weeks later, Ally stood behind her in a queue at the supermarket. She hadn't realized that Hilda lived nearby, but she couldn't have mistaken her, with her crisp white hair, in stretch leggings and trainers and a red down jacket. Ally wasn't working that afternoon. She had told her mum to go to bed and promised to cook tea. In her wire basket she had sausages and eggs and tins of baked beans and a plastic pack of four jam doughnuts, one each (she had another brother, James, fourteen): she'd put on weight since she'd been home, not much, but enough to make her aware of some new soft fat around her waistline and cushioning her chin. Outside it was already dark at four o'clock; a sleety rain was driving across the supermarket car park. In Hilda's basket there was olive oil, a tin of cannellini beans, fresh pasta, a lemon, a bottle of white wine.

Hilda had not noticed Ally waiting behind her, so Ally could easily not have said anything. Seeing the selection of things in Hilda's basket, though—her brave indifference to her surroundings—Ally didn't want her to go off into the night without acknowledgment.

"Hello, Hilda," she said. "How's the novel going?"

Usually it was the one question that couldn't fail with course-goers. But Hilda turned from the checkout with a face of pure resentment, staring and challenging.

"Who are you? Were you on that course? I don't remember you."

People looked at them. Ally felt exposed, as if she were pretending to be something she wasn't. Almost certainly some of the people looking would know what had happened to her family: it was a small town, and usually she was careful to make herself inconspicuous; her mother complained that she hid behind her long hair. While Ally explained, admitting that it was unlikely that Hilda would remember her—she'd mostly been in the office, present only once in the evening—Hilda was packing her shopping into the canvas bag she'd brought, deliberately, as if she had a system. She paid with a card, querying something on her bill.

"I thought the olive oil was one-eighty-nine?"

"That's only if you buy two bottles," the girl at the till said with flat indifference, not looking up from where she was staring at the slot that would spew the receipt. "If you only buy one, it's two-nineteen. It's a special offer."

"That isn't made very clear on the labelling on the shelf."

Ally was aware that everything about Hilda, especially her ringing, reasonable, confident Canadian voice, was making the till girl resent and despise her.

"I'm sorry I didn't recognize you," Hilda said to Ally, but not warmly, when she was finished. She hiked the canvas bag onto her shoulder. "I'm in a hurry, anyway. I have to go."

"It's O.K., don't worry."

The till girl extended the same hostility to Ally: she had been outed now as belonging to Hilda's type, cooking with olive oil, betraying themselves in oblivious loud voices. Even the most minor setbacks, in those months, could throw Ally completely. When she left the supermarket, Hilda was waiting for her, where the positive neon universe of shopping bordered on the smudged antimatter outside, cars plashing out of the car park through the wet.

"Shit, that was rude of me," Hilda said. "What's your name?"

"Ally. No, really, it's all right."

"Hey, you're upset. I wasn't that bad, was I? I think I owe you an explanation."

"There's other stuff. It's just been a bad day."

"You asked about my novel, that's the thing. I'd waited a lot of years to write that novel. But, if you want to know, my novel died."

Ally wiped her face on her coat sleeve. "I'm sorry. Perhaps it isn't really that bad. Maybe if you put it away for a few weeks and looked at it again you'd feel differently about it. I've heard writers at the center say that."

"No, really, take it from me, the novel died. What other stuff? What kind of bad day? Can I share? Can I give you a lift somewhere?"

Share? Ally thought. No, I don't think so.

She said that she lived only ten minutes' walk away, but Hilda insisted on driving her there—it was on her way—and it was easier to accept than to insist. The car was tiny, Continental-looking, green-colored with a lighter-green leaf stencilled on the door, as distinctively alien in the car park as Hilda had been among the shoppers inside. The interior smelled of dog, although there wasn't one: Hilda explained that she had been at work all afternoon—she was a part-time receptionist at the health center—and she'd had to leave her dog at home.

"Drop me here, please," Ally said. "This is the end of my street. There's no point in turning up into it—you'd only get stuck in the one-way."

Hilda pulled out of the stream of traffic onto the pavement. It was home time; there were queues at the lights going out of town. Ally's parents' house was on an estate at the town's edge; ahead, she could just make out the black slopes of the moors. In the car, it was stuffy and slightly disgustingly cozy, the wipers going, the windows steaming up.

"So what was the other stuff?" Hilda asked, with the engine still running.

Ally, with her hand on the lever, about to open the car door, was thinking that nothing on earth was strong enough to pull this ugly secret out of her, least of all a woman who thought it mattered if her stupid novel had died. She was clenched up with the same resentment as the till girl, at Hilda's ready wisdom shining about like a searchlight, the clean straight-backed way she sat at the steering wheel, her bag full of food for the wrong climate. The next moment, without even knowing that she'd changed her mind, she spilled over with her story—not the full version with all the details, but enough—surprising herself, as if she'd opened her mouth for something quite different.

"*Je*-sus," Hilda said.

"Prison has changed you, Mom."

• •

It was a relief to have told her. That would teach her not to ask. Ally watched the wipers push the water about in fan shapes on the windscreen.

"I can't just drop you off on the side of the road after you've told me that. Can't I come in? Won't you come home with me? I've got dinner for two. We could talk."

"I have to go. My mum's waiting. I promised I'd make the tea. And I don't need to talk."

"O.K., understood. But listen. Will you give me your phone number? I'd love to call. May I? We'll fix up something. Come and meet the dog."

Only to be free of her, Ally wrote the number on an envelope that Hilda found in her bag. That'll be the last I hear from her, she thought.

"Your name's Ally, right?" Hilda checked, leaning across the front seat after her.

Ally read novels, wrapped up in her duvet beside the central-heating radiator in her bedroom, borrowing them from the center and the public library, sometimes finishing one and starting another without even changing her position or getting up to make coffee, like an addict. She knew that this wasn't the right kind of reading. Studying for her literature degree, she had learned how to analyze the words and the themes; she had worked dutifully on her essay style, imitating academic articles. She imagined the reading she did now as like climbing inside one of those deep old beds she'd seen in a museum, with a sliding door to close behind you: even as she was suffering with a book and could hardly bear it, felt as if her heart would crack with emotion or with outrage at injustice, the act of reading it enclosed and saved her. Sometimes when she moved back out of the book and into her own life, just for a moment she could see her circumstances with a new interest and clarity, as if they were happening to someone else.

It was around this time that Ally's mum started wearing Ryan's shirts under her clothes. The first time Ally caught her doing it, she arrived home early one lunchtime, and when she came in the back door Mum looked up with a guilty face from washing dishes at the sink. Through all those weeks, their house had never lapsed from its perfect tidiness and order. Last thing at night, her parents still rinsed out the coffee cups, plumped up the cushions on the sofa, unplugged the television. Her mother picked up threads from the carpet and put them in the wastepaper basket. Ally knew right away when she came into the kitchen that something was wrong in her mother's shape, something bulky and distorting, when usually she was petite and trim. Ryan hadn't been enormous for an eighteen-year-old, but on his mother his checked lumberjack shirt was swamping, enveloping. Her thin neck looked scrawny, poking out through the top of it; her neat faded face without its makeup seemed scoured clean. She hadn't pulled the collar of the shirt out over the neck of her sweatshirt, as if she were hoping that no one would notice it, but it stuck up anyway.

"What are you doing wearing that thing?"

She shouldn't have said anything, but she couldn't help it.

Swapping clothes was the kind of thing that Ryan had done with his girlfriend, Yvonne. Yvonne would come downstairs after the two of them had been shut up for hours in his bedroom, pink-faced, wearing one of Ryan's tops, pulling the too long sleeves down over her hands, flaunting to the world this outward sign of her feminine smallness snuggled against his bulk. When Mum bought Ryan a perfectly good pair of black Thinsulate gloves, he exchanged them for some silly cheap spangly ones of Yvonne's. No one in the family had exactly objected to this at the time, but there was no doubt that they'd thought it soppy. They'd teased Ryan for being sentimental—he was like their dad, still moony over Mum after all these years. Mum, in particular, didn't have much time for Yvonne. Now she was wearing his shirt herself, and it was a sign of how far she had been broken down.

"It makes me feel better if I can smell him."

Ally wrapped her arms around her from behind. She pressed her face into her neck, sniffing the shirt collar. Her mum held herself stiffly apart inside the embrace.

"It doesn't smell of anything, except fabric softener."

"Underneath it I can smell him."

Ally willed herself to remember real things about her brother, neutral things, uncontaminated by the new aura, like worship and dread, that was attached to the idea of him. She remembered that after he'd finished his A2 exams in the summer, for example, when he was supposed to be looking for a job, he had played his Nintendo Wii in the afternoons, downstairs in the sitting room, in the boxers and T-shirt and socks he had slept in, Ally protesting at the sight of his thickly hairy legs. Her mother wouldn't have wanted to wrap herself in the smell of him then. Ally longed to climb back inside the safety of that time, when none of them wanted too much of one another.

There had been some tormented to-and-fro between the two families, Ryan's and Yvonne's, telephone calls and visits, breakdowns and comfortings, an evening when Yvonne's mother called Ally's mum, begging her to talk to

Yvonne, because she was threatening to do what Ryan had done, "since everyone blamed her for it anyway." Yvonne was one of those miniature girls whom teenage boys love: their smallness seems to promise that they will be sweetly malleable. She had a mass of curls the color of ripe wheat, tight golden skin, a child's body so pliant that she could still do cartwheels and backflips. She wrote all over her hard tiny hands with ballpoint pen: telephone numbers, silly faces that changed their expression when she moved her fingers. But actually Yvonne wasn't malleable—she was steely. She'd had Ryan running around after her whims as if she were a princess. "She might as well enjoy it," Ally's mum had said back then. "She'll be a dowdy little cow by the time she's thirty."

The awful intimacy between the two families subsided after the first weeks. They drew apart; they couldn't speak to one another anymore. In those sessions they had dragged too deep, dredging up some rotten taste from the bottom of their lives which tainted all their interactions afterward. Then Yvonne began texting Ally, and lying in wait for James on his way home from school. Even James knew not to tell Mum about this. Yvonne claimed that she only wanted advice on what she should do with the stuff that Ryan had given her; she made James take a plastic bag full of his CDs. "Chuck it all out," Ally texted back. "If you don't want it."

At the inquest, it all came out about the letter that Ryan had left, with messages for Yvonne—how amazing she was, how his life wasn't worth living without her. In the context, these seemed less like loving compliments than like punishments. Ally could imagine how it must feel to have these ideas stuck to you, impossible to clean off. But she couldn't make herself like Yvonne any better.

Hilda rang her.

"Ally? Is that Ally? Remember me? I was the bitch in the supermarket. You're having a hell of a time. Why don't you come out here and yell about it?"

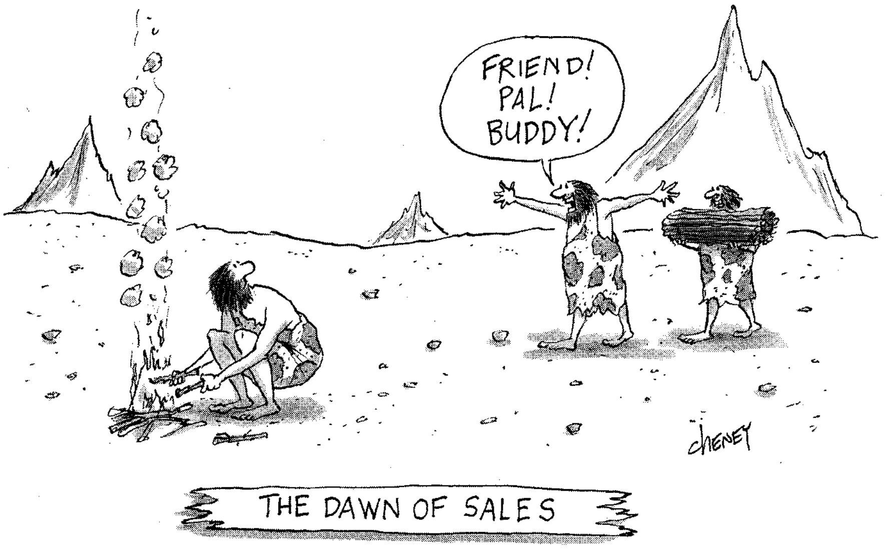
Ally felt remote from anyone who talked like this. But her mum encouraged her to get out, make a new friend. Most of the girls Ally had known at school had moved away from home, to go to university or to find jobs. She'd had a boyfriend in Manchester, but that relationship had melted away in the fierce assault of the first days of crisis. She hadn't wanted him anywhere near it.

"She's not exactly a friend, Mum. She's older than you."

"Well, someone you can talk to. It's not good for you, being stuck here all the time with us. At least James has got school."

"I don't know why everyone thinks I need to talk."

She called in at Hilda's one afternoon, after she had finished work at the center. The cottage wasn't where she'd thought it was. She had to drive around for a while before she found it, at the top of a hill a mile outside Kirby, with a stand of woods beyond it. Hilda in her red down jacket came out with the dog as she parked: it was a short-haired terrier, alert and intelligent, white with a brown patch over one eye. Hilda proposed that they take a walk right away, before it got dark. Ally hadn't imagined them walking. She was wearing her pink trainers, and had to borrow Wellingtons from Hilda. They followed a path invisible under the snow, down toward the woods along the side of a big L-shaped field, the dog scouting ahead of them, racing back on her tracks to herd her humans together, straining her ears yearningly at the perturbed, watchful sheep. The afternoon was still and soundless, frozen. There had been a fresh fall of snow the night before, and the fences and trees stood out black against it. Already the moon had risen, a flake of waxy alabaster in a blue sky thin with light.



THE DAWN OF SALES

Hilda complained about the farmer whose land they were walking on. She said that she had contacted the R.S.P.C.A. because he didn't treat the foot rot in his sheep, and that he'd tried to stop her walking there, although it was a public right of way. It was true that quite a few of the sheep seemed to be hobbling on three legs, or half kneeling, their front legs bent at the joint. Ally worried that the farmer would come out to confront them. She didn't want to have to take sides. As she tramped beside Hilda on the way back, the day draining out of the sky seemed to empty her, too, leaving her weightless. When they arrived back at the cottage, they could still see each other clearly, but the light was at its moment of transition, and, as soon as they went inside, the night outside the windows appeared perfectly dark. In the cottage downstairs there was only one room, with a kitchen at one end and a sitting room at the other, a flagged floor and a wood fire smoldering in a wide stone hearth, one wall stripped back to the naked stone. Hilda put logs on the fire and switched on a couple of lamps.

The room was uncluttered, considering how small it was, but everything in it was striking and eccentric: the faded rugs, the pictures on the walls, a wool blanket woven in bright colors flung over the back of the sofa, collections of stones and twisted weathered deadwood from the moors. The effect seemed spontaneous, but Ally knew that it must have taken a huge effort to get it to this state, removing all the layers of paint and wallpaper and carpeting and coziness. There were photographs of Hilda's three grown children, two daughters and a son. Hilda said that she had divorced her husband twenty years ago and had mostly brought up the children by herself. He was an Englishman. The only good thing he'd ever done for her was introduce her to this part of the country. She'd lived in Leeds for years, had moved out to the cottage when her younger daughter left home. Then she'd saved and bought herself a whole year off work, to get on with her novel. When she abandoned the novel, and the money ran out, she'd decided to get a local job, part time.

"I can manage," she said. "Cut the consumer crap. We don't need half as much as they want to persuade us to buy. How long I'll stay at the health center I don't know. The staff aren't friendly."

Ally couldn't imagine Hilda fitting in around here. People would think she was too full of herself: her neat frame seemed packed up tight with personality and experience. Her self-sufficiency made Ally feel unformed. She hung on to the mean little nugget of knowledge: that the writers on the course had said Hilda was too intense, had no sense of humor. There was no sign of a television anywhere in the cottage, only shelves of books.

"Didn't you ever want to go home to Canada?"

"England's home. I've lived here longer now than I lived there. Anyway, two of my children live in London, and one's in Dundee. I couldn't live thousands of miles away from them."

Hilda told Ally to wrap herself in the blanket in front of the fire: she explained that it was a button blanket, made by a Tlingit artist. Then she brought her tea and a slab of apple cake she'd made herself, without eggs or dairy.

"I want to ask you how you are," she said, sitting on a cushion on the hearthrug. "Real question, not the polite version. You can tell me it's none of my business. We hardly know each other."

"I'm O.K."

"You honored me with your confidence the other day."

"I'm really O.K. Why don't you tell me about your novel instead? You said you had been waiting all your life to write it."

She thought that Hilda flinched. "Outside the shop? Did I say that?"

"Something like that."

Hilda considered carefully. "You're angry because I talked about it so seriously, as if my novel were a disaster in the real world. But, of course, it can't be weighed in that world. Against the life of one of my children, say, it isn't a feather. Or against the life of anyone's child."

"It mattered to you, though."

Ally wasn't interested in the novel itself. She wanted to dig down to the raw shame of this failure in Hilda, this thing inside her, poisoning everything, cut off and spoiled and shrivelled up.

Hilda told her the story of the Guitar Player. In the late sixties, when Hilda was fifteen, her mother had had an affair with a singer-songwriter. It had happened in a big house on a lake in Saskatchewan, where Hilda's mother was employed as a live-in cook and cleaner. The house had belonged to a Toronto music producer, who brought his friends out to party in the summer. Even while the affair was happening, Hilda's mother had gone on cleaning and washing up and cooking. She said she'd rather be busy than hang around doing nothing. She refused to take any money beyond her wages. She really was the kind of woman that folksingers sang about in those days, or she made herself into that kind of woman: good at growing things and cooking and healing and comforting. That summer, Hilda's mother had gone around barefoot and worn long dresses, with her hair down to her waist, and the guests had treated her as if she were a kind of child of nature, because she lived out by the lake year round. All of them had been a bit in love with her, especially after the Guitar Player had chosen her. She hadn't tried to explain to these guests the complications of her real life on the lake.

At the end of the summer, the Guitar Player had moved on, and Hilda's mother had never seen him again, but he'd had a success with a song that she always believed was about her: "She's the One," a hymn to beauty that could also be interpreted as a message of farewell or apology. Hilda's mother had bought the album and learned all the words. And, after she married Hilda's stepfather, whenever they had rows she would retreat to her den and play it over and over, singing along. By that time she'd cut her hair and was working as a receptionist at one of the lake hotels. But Hilda knew that the song wasn't really about her mother, although she had never told her so. She knew this because those words—"She's the one"—were what the Guitar Player had said to Hilda when he came looking for her for the first time. She'd slept in the attic of the big house: at night, she used to stand on a chair, craning her head out of the skylight to watch the grownups drinking and partying in the garden below or undressing to go skinny-dipping in the lake. When the Guitar Player had come into Hilda's room and lifted the sheet on her bed, he'd said not "You're the one" but "She's the one," as if he were describing her to somebody else, some objective judge watching.

She had been afraid, of course, but not sorry, not at the time. He was as moody and skinny as a boy, but he had a power that drew all the yearning in the place toward him, including hers. He'd hardly spoken to her before that, but he must have noticed her watching him. His real presence in her room had seemed a kind of miracle, refracted and thickened through everyone's adulation of him, through his pictures in magazines and on album covers. He'd been pretty high that night, exalted and weird; there were a lot of drugs around that summer. He'd said all kinds of strange things—Hilda was surprised that he could remember any of it afterward, but quite a lot of it had found its way into the song.

Hilda told her the real name of the singer-songwriter and Ally didn't recognize it. A crumb of apple cake had stuck to Hilda's cheek as she talked. She was at that tipping point in middle age. Mostly she was animated, buoyant, and flexible, her skin was good, and in spite of her white hair she seemed to belong to the world of choice and strength. Then, in some trick of the light, or because she sagged her chin into her wrinkling neck, or her too short trousers rode up above her ankle socks as she was sitting cross-legged, Ally saw for a moment the old woman she would become, vulnerable and stubborn, cut adrift. Ally knew about the sixties—hippies and psychedelia and free love—but they seemed actually less real to her than Victorian times. If Hilda had said that she'd seen Catherine Earnshaw's ghost tapping at the window, it would have had more of a thrill of possibility.

"It was a kind of rape. It was child abuse. But that wasn't how I saw it at the time. Later, in the seventies, I got very angry about it."

"What d'you think about it now?"

"When I was trying to write the novel, I made such an effort to remember it exactly. I played all the old music. Of course, it can't mean anything to you. How could I convey the power of those people? That was it, that was my failure—I couldn't convey it. But it was real. It happened. It was almost a physical thing—you couldn't separate out the music and the giftedness and the youth. There was like a hum of sex in the air all the time."

Ally made an effort to imagine Hilda as a fifteen-year-old, but even the room they were in made this difficult. Its uncompromising style conveyed the whole long adult effort of putting a life together. Hilda said that, in her twenties, the story of what had happened had blocked her; for years she hadn't been able to get past the cheat or the promise of it. She hadn't told anyone about it, certainly not her mother, not even her husband. She'd saved it up. She'd told herself that one day she would put it in a book, not to make a scandal—as if anyone would care!—but just to be finally free of it. And once she'd begun to think of it as a story it had stopped troubling her; the idea of writing it had even come to be a comfort to her in bad times, a resource stored inside her, opening possibilities in the future.

"But it was a dud," she said. "It was a wrong idea. I couldn't do it. What I wanted to say died on me. It died inside."

Hilda gave Ally a key to the cottage. "You can come here any time, if you need space. Make yourself a fire if I'm not here. Grab what you like to eat. Tilly will love to see you—she hates to be locked up in the house alone."

Ally took the key, but couldn't imagine that she'd ever need it. Then one afternoon when things were bad at home—trouble was blowing up around James's refusing to go to school—she drove to the cottage and let herself in. She told her mother that she was walking Hilda's dog, as a favor. She did take Tilly out, and then when they got back she made a fire and wrapped herself in the blanket and picked out one of the books from Hilda's shelves, losing herself in it so completely and deeply that when Hilda came back from work, pushing open the door, Ally looked up startled and didn't know for a moment where she was. After that, she started calling in at the cottage once or twice a week; sometimes Hilda was home and sometimes Ally was alone there. When Hilda went to Dundee for the weekend, to stay with her daughter who had cats, Ally slept at the cottage overnight, keeping Tilly company.

One evening, when she and Hilda were sharing a bottle of red wine, she explained what Ryan had done to kill himself, cutting his wrists with razor blades and bleeding to death in the bath. She'd never had to tell anyone this before: either they knew already or they didn't like to ask, but Hilda had come straight out with it. They were sitting staring at each other from opposite ends of the sofa, with their legs tucked under them; the dog in her basket was panting with pleasure in the warmth of the fire.

"Mum would have found him," Ally said. "Usually she gets home twenty minutes before my dad, except that day on an impulse she went the roundabout way to buy vegetables at the farm shop. I was away in Manchester. My other brother had football after school. It wouldn't have made any difference to what happened—there was no chance of stopping him or anything. He had died already, hours before. But it meant that Mum didn't have to find him. Dad found him instead. Dad said that that was the only saving grace in the whole thing, her buying those vegetables."

The wine made little waves in her glass, in time with the pounding of her heart. Hilda reached over to pull the blanket up around Ally's shoulders.

"Did you have any idea that he was so depressed?"

"Now, when we go over the music he was playing, and what he put on Facebook, everything suggests it. At the time, we just thought he was going through a phase. In fact he *was* just going through a phase. Only, stupid moron, he didn't leave himself any chance to come out of it."

"It's a terrible thing for his girlfriend," Hilda sighed. "It really fucks her up."

Ally couldn't bear the idea that Hilda would imagine Yvonne as something she wasn't, some kind of tragic heroine. "They were always splitting up and getting back together again, working themselves up into a lather of feeling, one way or another. It didn't mean anything."

"But that's what you think love's all about when you're a kid."

"That kind of love makes me sick. It's such a fake."

When Hilda came back from Dundee, she brought Ally a stone she'd picked up on a beach there, oval and flat and black, striped with pinkish crystal, "pounded by the North Sea," she said. In Hilda's house, it was a beautiful thing, but it only looked odd among the ornaments on her bedroom shelf at home, as if a piece of outdoors had got indoors by mistake.

One morning when Ally was at the writing center, double-checking the details of next year's program of courses before they sent it off to press, Yvonne turned up, hovering outside the office door. Ally recognized her through the glass before she saw Ally inside: it was a fine day, brilliantly cold, so that blue sky was patched in the frame of the door behind Yvonne's yellow hair and short white bomber jacket. Her shoulders were hunched with the cold, her skinny midriff bare, hardly bulging over the top of tight jeans. She put her face up close to the glass, peering in. Ally felt like a fish in a bowl, helpless to escape being seen.

"I have to talk to you," Yvonne said once she'd got the door open, looking around suspiciously and showing no sign of wanting to cross the threshold of the office.

No "please" or "if you're not busy."

Ally took down her coat and suggested they walk along the river. She left a note on the desk for Kit. It was the second day of a short-story course, and all the students were at loose outdoors with notebooks and pens. They must have been given some writing exercise. Everywhere you looked, one of them seemed to be staring at nothing, drinking it in, transfixed: a dead stalk of dock weed or the blank corner of a stone wall or an icicle dribbled from the lip of a gutter. Dedicatedly they scribbled in their notebooks, squinting at the nothing from all angles.

"Shit a brick," Yvonne muttered, keeping her eyes on the ground. "What are they supposed to be doing?"

Ally felt bound to apologize for the center. She said that they were practicing observational skills.

"Observing my arse," Yvonne said.

Her thin little face, which had used to look creamy, was peaky, blue around the lips. Ally had always guessed that underneath Yvonne's neat sweetness—plucked straight brows, small nose, pink ears—something ferrety was waiting to appear. Yvonne walked rolling on her heels, with her arms wrapped across her chest, hands tucked up into her jacket sleeves for warmth. The path dropped to the river, and she looked around her, not enthusiastically, as if she didn't often find herself in the country. Bare alders and ash and blackthorn made a twiggy haze against the sun, which was already close to dropping behind the steep side of the river valley; the cold brown water coiled thickly in its bed. Ally felt better once they were past the last of the writers.

"Everybody hates me," Yvonne said. "I suppose that's what he wanted."

"We've been over all this," Ally said. "Nobody hates you."

Yvonne fished for something in her tight jeans pocket, thrust it out closed in her fist. "I wanted to give you this back."

Ally put her hands behind her. "I don't want it. What is it?"

"A stupid ring Ryan gave me."

"I don't want it."

In a spasm of temper Yvonne swung around and opened her hand, flinging away into the river something tiny that gave out one glint of light before it was swallowed without a splash, the water healing instantly behind it. The moment she'd done it she shrieked, pressing her hands across her mouth, and said that she hadn't meant to let it go, it was an accident.

"Ally, help me get it back!"

"Don't be silly. The water's too deep. You can't see to the bottom—you couldn't find it in a million years. It doesn't matter."

Yvonne went on shrieking and pleading. Crouching on the path, she started untying her trainers, dragging and clawing at the laces, as if she were going to wade in. On an impulse, because the whole scene disgusted her, Ally found herself calmly stepping into the river with her trainers still on, wading across the large flat submerged stones at its edge. At first she hardly felt the cold, only the pull of the moving water, as if something were clamped around her ankles. Then she stepped down into a deeper channel, among the smaller toffee-colored pebbles of the riverbed; the water here was halfway up to her calves, then up to her knees, soaking her trousers, wrapping them against her legs, snatching her breath away with the shock of the cold. The force of the current where the river ran faster almost knocked her off balance, though it looked lazy on the surface. She steadied herself by hanging on to a slippery boulder sticking up midstream and wondered if she should go any farther. Her jaw was clenched. It was difficult to remember how to move her feet in the trainers that began to feel numbingly huge and heavy.

She didn't care about the ring: she had stepped into the water only to make a point against the hysterical performance on the riverbank, to show it up in some way that was deliberate and disdainful. When she turned to look back at Yvonne, she was surprised at how far she had come: Yvonne on the path seemed distant, hugging her elbows, shouting directions that Ally couldn't hear over the water rushing past. It seemed a different universe out here in the river. The whole scene, the sad story that had brought them together, was framed for her for a moment as if from some far-off future perspective, and her rage against Yvonne washed out of her. Wanting only to be kind, she began hunting for the ring in all seriousness, peering at the riverbed, fishing for gleams in the water, her hands aching from the cold as if the flesh were being dragged off her bones. She realized that Yvonne was shouting from the bank for her to come back, please come back. It didn't matter, Yvonne shouted. It was only a ring.

At that moment, Ally saw it, caught just underwater in a crevice in a jagged chunk of shale, its gold picked out where a beam of the late light slanted at an angle from the water's surface. She reached out her hand to take it. ♦

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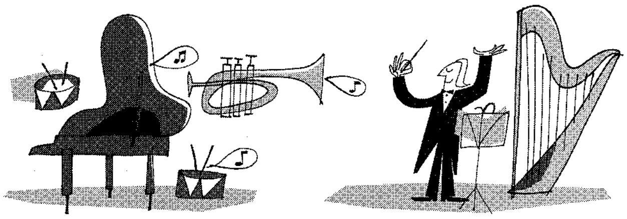


BOOKS

MAN WITH A PAST

Cavafy revisited.

BY DAN CHIASSON

Sometime before 1450 B.C. in the Egyptian city of Heliopolis, the pharaoh Thutmose III ordered a pair of obelisks. They were to be cut from red granite and erected at the Temple of the Rising Sun. Two hundred or so years later, Ramses II had them inscribed with boasts about his military triumphs. In 13 B.C., Augustus had the obelisks transported to Alexandria and installed at the Caesareum, Cleopatra's tribute to her husband, Mark Antony. There they stood sentry for another two thousand years, as the Caesareum and every subsequent building on that site got pulverized. By the time Napoleon entered Alexandria, in 1798, the obelisks—now known as Cleopatra's Needles—had taken on the "Ozymandias" look so fashionable then: one erect, one toppled, surrounded by "lone and level sand" on an empty beach. In the nineteenth century, Egypt gave the needles away: one to England, where it stands on the Victoria Embankment, in London; the other to the United States, where it stands in Central Park, near the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Early in the third millennium A.D., when I lived in New York, that's where I walked my dog.

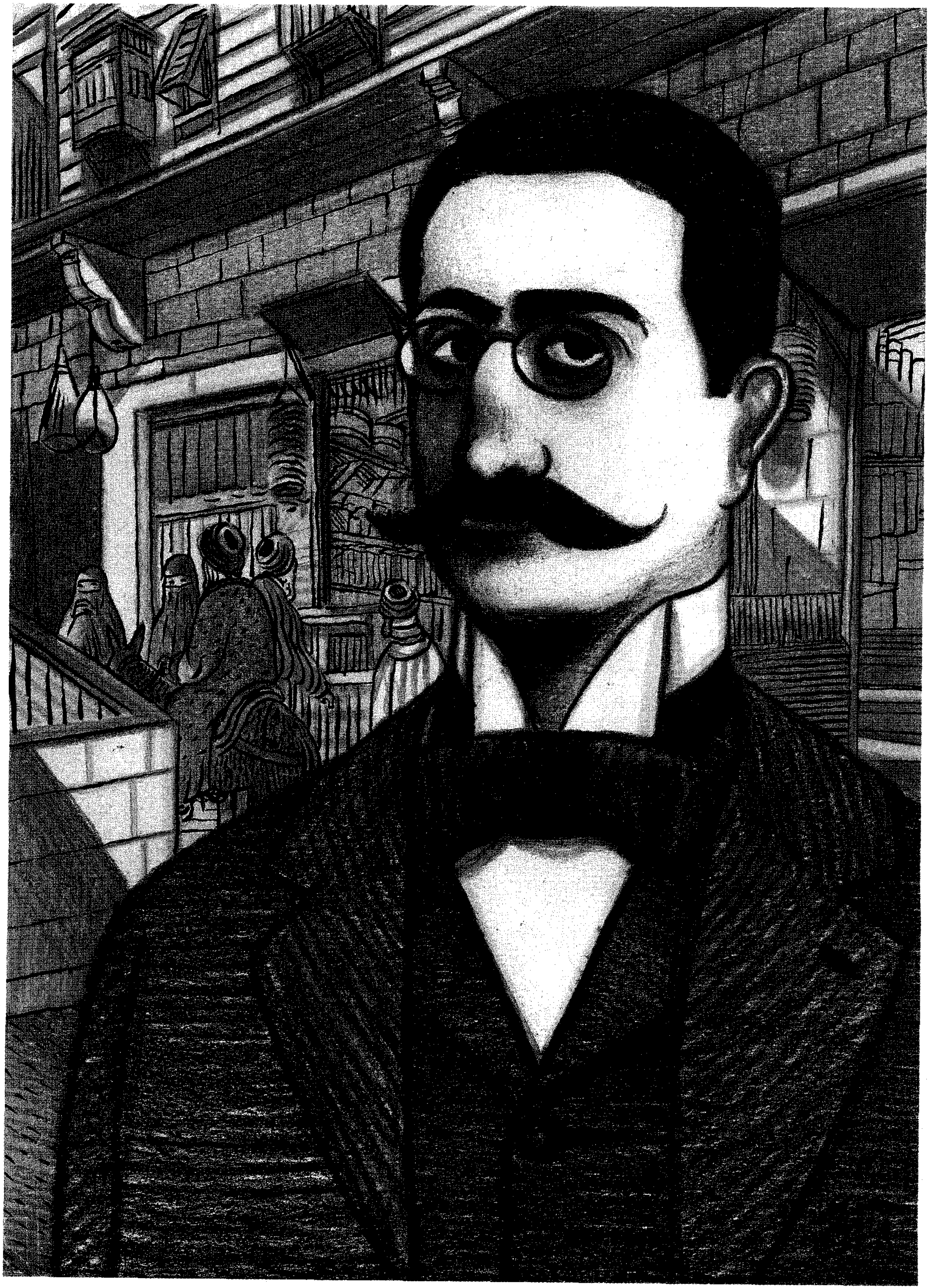
On the spot in Alexandria where the New York needle had stood were the offices of the Third Circle of Irrigation, which managed the water pumped from the Nile to the cotton and cornfields south of the city. This is where Constantine Cavafy, a member of Alexandria's large Greek colony and the greatest Greek poet since antiquity, spent thirty-three years, from 1889 to 1922, as a part-time clerk. Cavafy had visited the needles in their last days on Alexandrian soil. The city, pillaged for centuries, then left for dead, had few such treasures left. The body of St. Mark was supposedly stolen from the city in 828 by a band of Venetians, probably not the weirdest looting incident in Alexandria's history. On Cavafy's walk home from work he passed St. Saba's, erected on the site of an ancient Byzantine church, and, nearby, the Greek Hospital, where Hadrian was said to have built his Egyptian palace. A few steps from Cavafy's apartment was where Alexander the Great's body had once lain on display, encased in a gold sarcophagus.

City poets are by nature passive, the way flypaper is passive. The formula for Juvenal's Rome or Whitman's New York is look hard, listen hard, record. But all the real action in Alexandria had gone down a couple of thousand years earlier, and so the city had to be worked out in Cavafy's head. His job allowed him to daydream, except when his bosses got him to tell stories of Byzantium's glorious past. By day, he performed his ordinary Alexandrian act: leaving the office; hitting the stock exchange, where he was licensed to trade; visiting a billiards club. At night he paid beautiful young men—dishwashers and tailors' assistants and grocery boys—for sex. Cavafy's work draws from two intensely private sources: the old histories of the Hellenic world which he read in the evenings, and the nights of sex, rigged for retrospective poignancy, that ensued. His readers were limited to the select group who received his poems, privately printed on broadsheets or bound in folders. To encounter him, as his friend E. M. Forster wrote, was to behold "a Greek gentleman in a straw hat, standing absolutely motionless at a slight angle to the universe."

Daniel Mendelsohn has translated all of Cavafy's poems, including the thirty "unfinished" poems never before rendered in English. The results—now published in two volumes, "C. P. Cavafy: The Collected Poems" (Knopf; $35) and "C. P. Cavafy: Unfinished Poems" (Knopf; $30)—are extraordinary, and a whole galaxy orbits them. Cavafy thought of himself as a "poet-historian," which meant that he viewed all human conduct, his own included, in the light of recorded time. When Ezra Pound called the Cantos a "poem containing history," he exempted his poem itself from history, and the second sense of "containing" applies as well: the Cantos are a kind of quarantine of the past. But in Cavafy history is the container: individuals rattle around inside it like pennies in a can. Cavafy believed that you couldn't "remember" history no matter what you did, and, in any case, you weren't "condemned to repeat it," because it had never gone away. All of the modernist sententiae about history with a capital "H" seemed silly to Cavafy, whose lovers were envoys to the whole Hellenic past.

Because everybody dwells in history together, all at once, Cavafy refused to divvy up the available moods into one pile appropriate for obscure Byzantines and another for his Alexandrian rent boys. This makes him a master of mismatched affect, bringing tenderness to Nicephorus III Botaneiates (the eleventh-century Byzantine emperor), to Apollonius of Tyana (the neo-Pythagorean near-contemporary of Jesus), and to Lucius Vibullius Hipparchus Tiberius Claudius Atticus Herodes (the second-century rhetorician and author of a single extant parable, about grief). The forsakenness of these figures attracted him; their preposterous names alone, strung like beads along a wire, seemed to mark them for obscurity. In "Caesarion," Cavafy reads

ABOVE: LENE DUE-JENSEN; OPPOSITE: LORENZO MATTOTTI



Cavafy was a city poet, but he knew that the real action in Alexandria had taken place a couple of thousand years earlier.

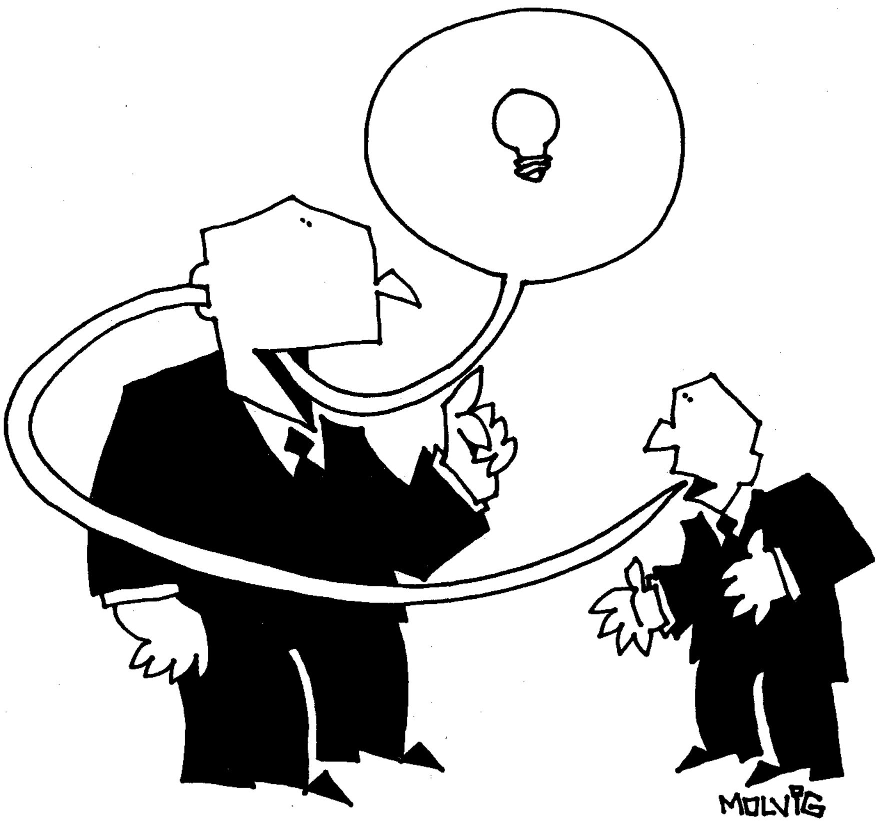
"a collection / of Ptolemaic inscriptions" and discovers identical, interchangeable "unstinting laudations and flatteries." Then "a tiny, / insignificant reference to King Caesarion" attracts Cavafy's attention:

> Ah, there: you came with your indefinite
> charm. In history there are only a few
> lines that can be found concerning you;
> and so I could fashion you more freely in my mind.
> I fashioned you this way: beautiful and feeling.

Later in the poem, Cavafy reports that he "dared to think you came into my room, / it seemed to me you stood before me." Cavafy restores to Caesarion the "beauty" and "feeling" that history effaced, a sexual favor that our boy Caesarion, son of Julius Caesar and Cleopatra, murdered on Octavian's order, has travelled through time to repay.

A connoisseur of history's castaways, Cavafy, oddly, seemed tempted by his own obscurity. Someone needed to intervene, and Forster was well placed to do so. Forster had come to Alexandria to work for the Red Cross as a "searcher," interviewing soldiers returning from Gallipoli about their lost comrades. (Michael Haag's excellent "Alexandria: City of Memory" paints a vivid portrait of this phase.) Forster's mother wouldn't allow him to do ambulance service in Italy; the sleepy boondocks of Alexandria offered the safer bet. When he met Cavafy, in 1916, Forster was living in the Hotel Majestic, writing "Maurice." Cavafy was living alone in his flat on the Rue Lepsius, above a brothel, where he remained until his death, seventeen years later. Their early meetings were cordial, but Forster had little Greek and limited capacity to appreciate Cavafy's genius: to Forster, he was at first a mere "rearranger" and "resuscitator" of the ancient past. Cavafy returned the ambivalence. Only when he sensed that Forster, a much younger man, was "following" his work did he bring out the bread and cheese, the *mastica* from Chios, or the good whiskey. Then, Forster wrote, "his talk would sway over the Mediterranean world and over much of the world within."

The best guests were removed to a small red salon by the balcony, a safe distance from the "Arabo-Byzantine clutter" of the apartment: old armchairs and folding chairs, trinkets from India and China, ugly vases, and a small library composed, a friend reported, of "unmentionable novels by unknown and forgotten writers." Forster included "The God Abandons Antony," a poem he first heard in the red salon, in his 1922 "Alexandria: A History and a Guide." It was Cavafy's first appearance in English. If your work is to be introduced to the English-speaking world in a travel guide, be certain that E. M. Forster is its author.



Cavafy was fifty-three when Forster met him, but in certain ways his life had just begun. He was born in 1863 into a merchant family that was prominent in Alexandria's Greek colony. Cavafy's father, an importer-exporter of corn and cotton, was honored at the opening of the Suez Canal, in 1869. He died suddenly the next year, and the family moved to Liverpool and then London, where Cavafy lived between the ages of nine and fourteen. He later wrote a few poems in English, and spoke Greek with an English accent. Soon the business failed, and the family settled again in Alexandria in 1877. His mother had left the city a famous beauty; she returned addled and damaged, and eventually became a recluse. A year before she died she started hearing "a sound like *gnous gnous gnous*" in her head. She required constant tending, and the job fell eventually to Cavafy, who addressed her, apparently affectionately, as "Fat One."

These were the years when Cavafy maintained a double life, letting his mother wear herself out over dinner, then sneaking off, aided by her servant, into the seedy districts of Alexandria to cruise for young men. In short, if a great poet hadn't been sneaking around on his mother, an entire world of cabarets and coffee shops, as vivid in its way as Dickens's London, might have passed without notice. "The difficulty of being Cavafy's kind of homosexual in Alexandria in those years must have been staggering," James Merrill, whose poems were influenced by Cavafy, wrote. "How to choose among a thousand daily opportunities."

The experiences Cavafy was having on those consummate Alexandrian nights took years to register in his poems. Well into his thirties, Cavafy was writing the in-stock-and-ready-for-delivery fin-de-siècle poem every other exquisite young man wrote at the time:

Far from the world, poetic magic makes
him drunk;
all the world, for him, is lovely verse.
For her bard, Imagination built a house:
strong,
incorporeal, which fortune will not jar.

These early poems inadvertently describe their own deficiencies: they are, like the atmospheres they conjure, "drunk," "drowned," "perfumed," and "aromatic." As of 1900, Cavafy seemed destined to sleepwalk his way into irrelevance.

Then, as Cavafy's friend the poet George Seferis put it, "something extraordinary happened." By 1902, his mother, his three brothers, his grandfather, and two of his closest friends had died. Perhaps in response to all that loss, he turned away from the somnambulism of his early work. (Yeats, distancing himself from his own early work, got it right: "In dreams begin responsibilities.") He was reading Gibbon against the grain, and took personally Gibbon's condemnation of Byzantium as effete and enervated—especially since the poems he had written about Byzantium were rather effete and enervated. During 1902 and 1903, Cavafy submitted all his poems to what he called his "philosophical scrutiny." Poets often resent or belittle their early work, but rarely does a poet turn against his poems with such sangfroid. There would be no more "flagrant inconsistencies, illogical possibilities [and] ridiculous exaggeration." Much of Cavafy's work up to that point (he was turning forty) was to be "sacrificed" in favor of what he called "the new work."

What Cavafy came up with was less a style than a refusal of style. His new poems are epitaphs only minimally elaborated: once they begin, they begin ending. They make the most of stock materials: some good-enough adjectives, a few perceptions that will do, some ironies already demonstrated elsewhere. They are more turpentine than paint. "The God Abandons Antony," the poem Cavafy read to Forster in his apartment, presents a Mark Antony thinned beyond recognition, unaware that Shakespeare had given him an inner life:

When suddenly, at midnight, there comes
the sound
of an invisible procession passing by
with exquisite music playing, with voices
raised—
your good fortune, which now gives way;
all your efforts'
ill-starred outcome; the plans you made
for life,
which turned out wrong: don't mourn
them uselessly.

Cavafy, who had read the dramatic monologues of Robert Browning, could have outfitted Antony with all the tics and spasms that in Browning's monologues suggest authentic subjectivity. Instead, he assigns Antony a mind from afar, allowing him nothing more than the commonplace disappointments: luck runs out, outcomes are not what one had hoped, plans are dashed. If these lines were spoken in the first person, the poem would read like a second-grade class play.

Nobody who reads "The God Abandons Antony" goes away sad about poor Mark Antony. Cavafy's history poems crash-test one eminence after another against the same hard fate. If only these people would get together and *talk*, you think. But the point of history is that people don't get together and talk. The injunctions to the historical Antony come to seem, by the poem's end, general-purpose instructions for any sufferer:

Like one who's long prepared, like some-
one brave,
as befits a man who's been blessed with a
city like this,
go without faltering toward the window
and listen with deep emotion, but not
with the entreaties and the whining of a
coward,
to the sounds—a final entertainment—
to the exquisite instruments of that initi-
ate crew,
and bid farewell to her, to Alexandria,
whom you are losing.

Cavafy would write a number of erotic poems in historical dress—"Caesarion" is one—but until 1910 he hadn't attempted what Pound called "direct treatment of the thing." "The thing," in Cavafy's case, was homosexual desire, a difficult subject to treat directly at the time. Oscar Wilde had, within memory, spent two years in prison for "gross indecency." Cavafy had a model for sexual frankness in the Greek Anthology, that remarkable compilation of ancient insults, boasts, epigrams, and erotica, much of it recovered from mummy wrappings and pottery shards. But many of those writers were anonymous, and all of them had the advantage over Cavafy—a towering advantage if one wants to talk openly about gay sex—of having been dead several thousand years.

During the next two decades, until his death, in 1933, Cavafy would compile one of the great bodies of poetry in any literature, and the "sensual" poems, as he called them, are at its heart. These poems apply to Cavafy's own past the descriptive rations that had to do for Lysias the grammarian, say, or Herodes Atticus. The approach feels radical. Cavafy had read and absorbed the English Romantics, and is sometimes described as a latter-day Romantic. But his model of recollection differs from Wordsworth's the way an outline on tracing paper differs from a Delacroix. Here is "He Came to Read—," a poem from 1924, in full:

He came so he could read. Lying open
are two or three books: historians and
poets.
But he'd barely read for ten minutes,
when he put them aside. On the sofa
he's half asleep. He's completely devoted
to books—
but he's twenty-three years old, and very
handsome;
and this afternoon desire has come
to his flawless flesh, and to his lips.
To his flesh, which is beauty entire,
the fever of desire has come;
without foolish shame about the form of
its enjoyment. . . .

That implied quotation—we hear the phrase "completely devoted to books" in the boy's voice—sketches and erases the boy's presence in a single gesture. Otherwise, the poem is a checklist. Which lover was this? The one who had come to read. Handsome, check; flawless, check; beauty, check. There was a negotiation, or the pantomime of one: the boy protested; Cavafy, with that one word, "foolish," prevailed. There would be no more reading that day.

Most of Cavafy's erotic poems look back to these moments, "before time could alter them," of a young man's perfect ripeness. This is the moment when any young man becomes, by the transitive property of beauty, every young man, and these poems hit the same ironies over and over: beauty fades, good fortune dries up, youth gives way to decrepit old age. This is well-known information, to say the least. But Cavafy suffers it afresh with every instance, and he suffers it entirely, without the comforts of metaphor: nobody is ever compared to a falling leaf, a dewdrop, or a sapling cypress. His tone, though it admits of tenderness, is stoical. His claims for art are insistent but rather modest. We feel the pressure of all these refusals in "To Stay," a poem about an anonymous liaison "in a corner of that dive; / in back of the wooden partition":

Delight in flesh amidst
clothes half undone:
quick baring of flesh—the image of it
has crossed twenty-six years; and now has come
to stay here in this poetry.

Mendelsohn translates the Greek verb *manei* not, as most translators have, as simply "to stay" but as "to stay here." Like a weary lodger, "the image . . . has crossed twenty-six years" perhaps just to stay the night. Cavafy invalidates his own boast; he knows what happens to Greeks when they boast.

It has often been said that Cavafy is an easy poet to translate. Joseph Brodsky found that Cavafy actually gained in translation. (Brodsky, who was translating his own poems into English, had a stake in believing this.) If translation is the undressing of a poem in one language in order to outfit it in another, Cavafy, by stripping his poems of so much Belle Époque excess, had done half of the translator's work. Brodsky argued that translation was "almost the next logical step in the direction the poet was moving." And, in one of the canonical statements on translation, W. H. Auden, who knew no Greek, found in Cavafy "a tone of voice, a personal speech" that defied every poet's assumption that what essentially distinguished prose and poetry is "that prose can be translated into another tongue but poetry cannot."

Because Cavafy generally avoids metaphor and verbal filigree, his poems have sometimes been taken for mere stacked prose. There are two problems with this idea. The first is that it is simply not accurate. Cavafy's Greek is without perfect English equivalent, since into its straight demotic it blends the government-promoted literary dialect known as Katharevousa ("purified"). The idea was to take ancient Greek words and forms out of their museum cases, polish them, and put them back into general use. Another problem is that every choice a poet makes, even the choice to rule out symbol and metaphor, carries symbolic and metaphorical value. Cavafy's relative verbal barrenness, therefore, has meaning, but the meaning depends on measuring his deliberately flat diction against an often complex prosody. The fact that Cavafy survives translation relatively unscathed, as he does, should not imply that he has survived all translations equally intact.

The volume that attracted Auden was Rae Dalven's "The Complete Poems of Cavafy," which was first published in 1961. A decade and a half later, Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard published "C. P. Cavafy: Collected Poems," a book that made an immediate impression. It became the official English Cavafy, the one favored by the Cavafy archive in Athens. Now a second generation of poets was reading Cavafy, including Czeslaw Milosz, Robert Hass, and Louise Glück. What these poets heard in Keeley and Sherrard was Cavafy tuned to unobtrusive English idiom, a kind of laid-back English estranged by Greek names and places. But Keeley and Sherrard had given up on Cavafy's rhyme, seeking instead a mysterious "equivalent discipline," and had generally eliminated the formal aspects that contribute to Cavafy's over-all texture, part chamois and part steel wool.

And yet some of Cavafy's best poems crucially depend on these formal signatures erased by Keeley and Sherrard. Cavafy used a broken-backed line, three beats on either side of a gap, for many of these poems. Here is Mendelsohn's version of the first stanza of "In Despair":

He's lost him utterly.   And from now on he seeks
in the lips of every new   lover that he takes
the lips of that one: his.   Coupling with every new
lover that he takes   he longs to be mistaken:
that it's the same young man,   that he's giving himself to *him*.

Seferis called this Cavafy's "tango" rhythm, but to me it feels more like masonry, phrase after blocklike phrase laid down and pounded level with a mallet. This levelling of affect embodies Cavafy's predicament: each new interchangeable lover is useful only insofar as he allows Cavafy to project the memory of that "utterly lost" love upon him; and yet the image fades the moment it is cast. The resulting panic is embodied in those tangled pronouns: "He's," "he," "his," "he," "he," "he's," "him." The italicized "*him*" is Cavafy's desperate attempt to designate a single target for all those pronouns, but language doesn't work that way: the pronouns miss, and the fact that they miss is the reason, after all, that Cavafy is in despair.

Not one of these effects is apparent in Keeley and Sherrard's low-wattage version of the same lines:

He lost him completely. And he now tries to find
his lips in the lips of each new lover,
he tries in the union with each new lover
to convince himself that it's the same young man,
that it's to him he gives himself.

This has power, but its tone is borrowed from the poems Cavafy wrote in free verse: resigned, almost narcotized, it suggests a speaker far from the throes and pitches that Cavafy intended for "In Despair" and that Mendelsohn so ably translates.

Cavafy's idea that experience comes "to stay here in this poetry" wagers that the poetry itself is going to stay. Yet it is hard to know how Cavafy envisioned his poems' afterlives and his own posthumous reputation. He did almost none of the obvious things poets do to rig the future in their favor. By the time Forster met him, Cavafy had turned almost exclusively to writing his poems and curating them according to his elaborate homemade system. He had abandoned his initial practice of distributing his poems on broadsheets. He now issued to his inner circle folders of his poems, painstakingly clipped together. Every poem was a palimpsest, and Cavafy often called these folders back to add a line or cross one out. He had originally taken his apartment, in 1907, to share with his brother Paul, a rakish figure with a Phaeton who was run out of town by his creditors after only a year. Now, in Paul's bedroom, Cavafy set up a bindery, with makeshift tables covered with stacks of folders, each stack a poem in all its versions over time.

The biographer Robert Liddell suggests that Cavafy refused to be published because he couldn't bear the thought of "unbought copies of his poems gathering dust in bookshops or being fingered contemptuously by his enemies." It seems unlikely, though, that a poet who had come to such disabused terms with time would have crumbled at the sight of his books, those poor orphaned babies, piled on a bookcase. Publication wasn't, as it was to Emily Dickinson, foreign "as Firmament to Fin." Mendelsohn suggests that Cavafy's method allowed him to regard "every poem as a work in progress," which is undoubtedly right. But there are many, more common ways for poets to achieve that end: keep the poems a secret (like Dickinson) or, if you let them out, go and ransack them every so often, the way Auden and, later, Robert Lowell, energetic revisers of their own work, did.

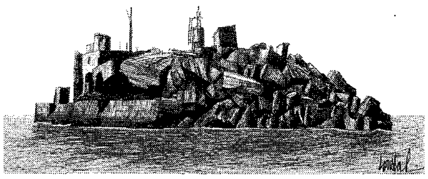
There is a tradition of assuming that once Cavafy broke through to his mature, "sensual" poems his own sexual desires were locked safely in the past. His "unfinished" poems betray little about Cavafy's life in the nineteen-twenties. But all that missing time had to be spent somewhere, and if Cavafy had lived to write into the nineteen-forties my guess is that we would have a record of robust sexual life two decades before.

What we do know is that, in 1924, Cavafy's homosexuality came to public light. It was a dispute about grammar—Greeks feel passionate about many things, but grammar would have to rank near the top of the list—that led Socrates Lagoudakis, a columnist for the local paper with inflammatory, somewhat comic opinions, to condemn Cavafy as "another Oscar Wilde." (Cavafy had spelled the Greek for "New York" with a smooth breathing mark, contra Lagoudakis, who, whenever he mentioned New York, used a rough one. Things escalated from there.) Cavafy's friends rallied to his side, and the whole episode quietly vanished. But it could have gone the other way. In 1924, Cavafy had good reason to keep his poems close by. Before strangers like you and me could see them, a little history had to intervene. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Kindly Ones, *by Jonathan Littell, translated from the French by Charlotte Mandell (Harper; $29.99).* Littell opens his Second World War novel, told through the recollections of a German officer named Max Aue, with a breakdown of how many Germans, Soviets, and Jews died, minute by minute, in the conflict. As Aue travels to Stalingrad, Auschwitz, and Hungary to report on morale and efficiency, long sections of bureaucratic analysis alternate with moments of mind-numbing sadism. Aue, a caricature of moral failure (he fantasizes at length about sodomizing his twin sister), encounters a cast of unintentionally comic characters, such as an obese and flatulent proponent of the Final Solution, who surrounds himself with Teutonic beauties. The Holocaust is recast as an extended bout of office politics, with German officials quarrelling over who is responsible for prisoners' hygiene. As the novel draws to a violent close, its story seems nearly as senseless as the horrors it depicts.

The Siege, *by Ismail Kadare, translated from the original Albanian into French by Jusuf Vrioni and from the French by David Bellos (Canongate; $24).* Albania's most distinguished novelist tells the story of fifteenth-century Ottoman invaders who lay siege to an Albanian fortress and find their assaults thwarted. Kadare mostly narrates from the Ottomans' perspective, but intersperses short, stylized accounts from the point of view of the besieged Christians. The novel's conscience is an official campaign chronicler for the invaders worried about how to confect a suitably stirring account from the failure and ugliness he witnesses. The resulting tone is both antic and poignant. At one point, Ottoman soldiers, unused to seeing women unveiled, look at the faces of women they have captured: "The men thought they were laughing, but they were actually sobbing. Unless it was the other way round."



Freedom's Battle, *by Gary J. Bass (Knopf; $35).* This engaging history of nineteenth-century campaigns to stop atrocities in Greece, Syria, and Bulgaria is a corrective to the idea that humanitarian interventions are a product of the "dreamy interlude" between 1989 and 9/11. The compelling narrative, rich with accounts of parliamentary debate and battlefield confrontation, presents a world of familiar political and military concerns, from the pressure of non-stop media coverage to the importance of a clear exit strategy. Bass's thesis that humanitarianism long preceded the crises of Bosnia and Rwanda is persuasive, but this history seems a less useful guide for future efforts than he supposes. Resulting policy recommendations add little to liberal internationalist orthodoxy, and the new ideas he suggests, such as dividing the world into spheres of influence, seem ill-suited to conflicts such as those in Zimbabwe and Darfur.

Flannery, *by Brad Gooch (Little, Brown; $30).* Drawing on recently unsealed letters and an impressive array of interviews, Gooch provides the first major biography of Flannery O'Connor since she died in 1964, at the age of thirty-nine. He presents a writer influenced by the early death of her father and the retreat from city life to country; an Irish Catholic upbringing that evolved into an adult fascination with theology; and a Southern small-town culture whose matrons, including O'Connor's mother, were happy for her success but put off by the unladylike nature of her work—"Everybody here shakes my hand but nobody reads my stories." Though she spent time in both the Midwest and the Northeast, lupus narrowed the circle of her life to a dairy farm in Milledgeville, Georgia, where she collected exotic birds. Gooch's account is meticulous, but O'Connor's sedate, chaste life is pale in comparison with her fantastic fiction—a contrast that underscores her inscrutable genius.

THE SKY LINE

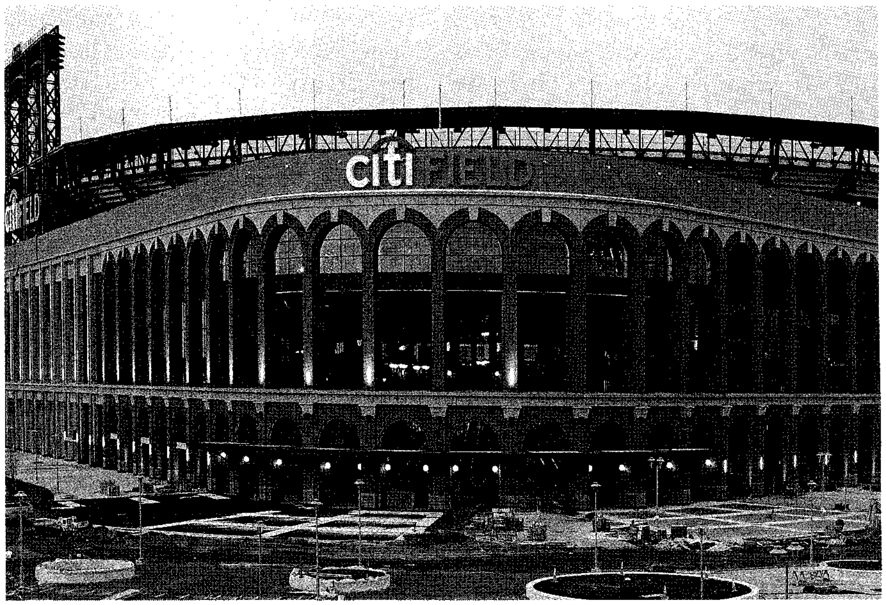
HOME

New stadiums for the Yankees and the Mets.

BY PAUL GOLDBERGER

In 1921, Colonel Jacob Ruppert, the co-owner of the New York Yankees, needed to get his team out from under the thumb of the New York Giants, his landlords at the Polo Grounds, in Harlem, and build his own stadium. Having looked at a plot occupied by an orphan asylum in upper Manhattan, some land in Long Island City, and an area on the West Side, over the Pennsylvania Railroad tracks, he settled on the Bronx. Just across the Harlem River from the Polo Grounds, he erected the largest and grandest stadium in baseball. Yankee Stadium, which opened in 1923, was a haughty structure designed to give the game a feeling of permanence lacking in earlier, scrappier ballparks, like Fenway Park, in Boston, Wrigley Field, in Chicago, and Ebbets Field, in Brooklyn. Unlike the builders of older ballparks, Ruppert didn't have to contort the stadium to fit the lines of city streets. The stadium could spread out and lift high; it was the first ballpark to have three full tiers of seats. Nestled beside elevated subway tracks and across from the playgrounds and basketball courts of Macombs Dam Park, Yankee Stadium rose above its surroundings.

There is nothing so revolutionary in Yankee Stadium's replacement, which opens just to the north, across 161st Street, on April 3rd, when the Yankees host the Chicago Cubs for an exhibition game. (The first regular-season game is on April 16th, against the Cleveland Indians.) The new Yankee Stadium, designed by the architectural firm HOK Sport, is effectively an attempt to atone for the brutal 1973 renovation of Ruppert's building, which removed the historic ambience without adding much in the way of modern amenities. HOK has reincarnated the old stadium, but with clearer sight lines, luxury suites, plenty of places to eat, and, finally, sufficient bathroom facilities. It has tried hard, very hard, to make us think of its predecessor, with sumptuous architectural effects that have the self-important air of a new courthouse built to look as if it had been there since William Howard Taft was President. When you first go in, you find yourself in the so-called Great Hall, an enormous space covered with a translucent roof, and from there you move into the concourses and toward the seats. Lest you forget that you are there not only to watch a baseball game but also to soak up the stadium's noble lineage, there's a reproduction of the famous scalloped frieze that adorned the old stadium's upper deck. Outside, there is a façade of limestone, granite, and cast stone, with high, narrow arched openings and entry portals that seem designed for the ceremonial arrival of the Pope, Queen Elizabeth, or at least George Steinbrenner.



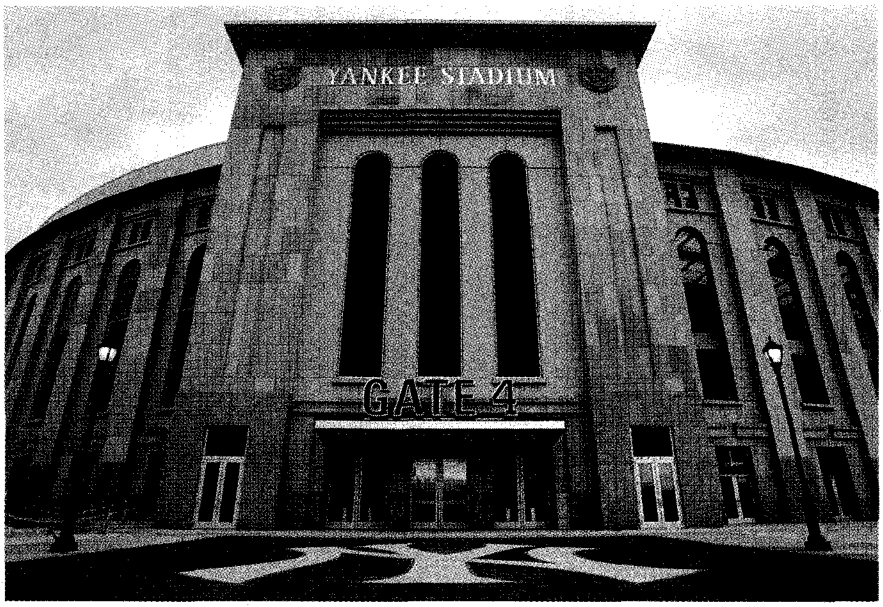
The Mets' new home echoes the famous entrance of the Dodgers' Ebbets Field.

DAVID SUNDBERG/ESTO

Also about to open is the New York Mets' new home—the first time that two major-league stadiums have opened in the same city at the same time. Citi Field, which people are already calling TARP Field, or Bailout Park, opens on March 29th, with a college game. (The Mets play an exhibition game there on April 3rd and their first regular-season game on April 13th.) Like the new Yankee Stadium, Citi Field is right next door to its predecessor and was designed by HOK Sport. The firm has pretty much cornered the market in sports facilities in recent years; in 1992, it designed the most influential ballpark of modern times, Baltimore's Oriole Park at Camden Yards. The Orioles insisted that the new park have the ambience of an old-fashioned one and feel connected to the city, and HOK, scrapping an earlier design, obliged. Camden Yards launched a generation of so-called retro-classic ballparks, a style to which both of New York's new stadiums conform, even though they look vastly different from each other.

The previous home of the Mets, Shea Stadium, opened in 1964, at a time when architects seemed to think that their mission was to purge baseball fields of asymmetry, idiosyncrasy, and anything that seemed remotely related to a park's surroundings, and to offer up instead gigantic doughnuts of concrete that looked like highway interchanges. (Other notable examples of the genre sprang up in Pittsburgh, Atlanta, Cincinnati, and St. Louis.) Citi Field is pleasanter in every way than the harsh stadium it replaces. The park has a casual feel, with warm red brick inside, lots of amenities, great sight lines, and a layout that's easy to navigate. There are forty-two thousand seats, fifteen thousand fewer than Shea had, all a calm dark green and arranged in somewhat irregular tiers, bringing you much closer to the field than before. The complex has an energetic composition of brick façades, and dark-gray steel elements, which are said to have been designed with the great steel arch of Hell Gate Bridge in mind, and give the place a feel that is as much industrial as retro.

As for the retro-classic side of Citi Field, the Mets, having no ancient ballpark of their own to evoke, have appropriated someone else's. The architects, whose Camden Yards design incorporated features of several historic ballparks, have here wrapped an imitation of the façade of the much mourned Ebbets Field around the southern corner of the new structure, and the old Brooklyn stadium likewise inspired the form of the entry rotunda. The Mets treat the National League's New York history as if it were abandoned property, which, in a way, it is. But does that mean it is there for the taking? True, the identity of the Mets—whose colors combine the blue of the Dodgers and the orange of the Giants—has thrived on a magpie element, but there's something a bit dishonest about naming the rotunda for Jackie Robinson, who never wore a Mets uniform. A pastiche of the Dodgers' former field in Brooklyn pasted onto the façade of a different team's twenty-first-century ballpark in Queens is less a historical tribute than it is an act of make-believe.



The new Yankee Stadium's grandiosity is tempered by the energy of its urban setting.

NEW YORK YANKEES

Historically, ballparks have been urban places, gardens in the middle of the city. The greatest of them—Wrigley, Ebbets, Fenway, Forbes Field, Shibe Park—emerged out of the form and shape of their cities. Fenway has the Green Monster, the thirty-seven-foot wall that compensates for the truncation of left field; at Griffith Stadium, in Washington, D.C., the center-field wall was notched inward because the owners of houses next to the stadium refused to sell. Ballparks weren't the same because the urban places they belonged to weren't the same. One football gridiron is identical to another, but a baseball field, once you get beyond the diamond, is not—which is part of the reason that even the ugliest ones are loved so fiercely by the fans and become such repositories of civic feeling. A baseball outfield, technically, has no outer limits, just as a baseball game has no set time to end. The outfield stops where the stadium's builders decide it will stop. Urban ballparks had façades in front, to fit in with neighboring buildings, but were usually left low and open in the outfield, which had the effect of weaving the park into the neighborhood, so that, from the right place, you might catch an enticing glimpse of the green paradise within.

At the old Yankee Stadium, that place was from the elevated tracks of the Lexington Avenue subway, and one nice feature of the new stadium is that that, too, has been re-created. There is a break between the right-field stands and the scoreboard, and you can see the trains sliding by. The new stadium feels more tightly woven into the fabric of the city than the old one did. (It will feel even more so once a Metro-North station opens there, later this year, and once the city finally makes good on its obligation to replace the Macombs Dam Park facilities lost in construction of the new stadium with parkland on and around the site of the previous one.) If you approach it by driving along Jerome Avenue, you see a couple of the Bronx's finest Art Deco apartment houses across the street from the west façade, and you get a hint of the subtle counterpoint that once existed between a baseball park and an urban setting. The stadium is bigger and more imposing than everything around it, of course, but it seems to grow out of its surroundings, and this somehow rescues the building from its own pomposity. In a way, the apartment houses on Jerome Avenue, the jumble of storefronts and bars under the elevated tracks on River Avenue, and the constant presence of street life shape the stadium as much as its designers have.

At Citi Field, conversely, the Ebbets Field façade, stuck in the middle of acres of parking (as Shea was), seems more like a theme park than it would if it were in the middle of the city. HOK has tried to make the stadium feel more urban by placing a long brick building, containing the Mets' offices, just beyond right field, along 126th Street, where it faces a favela of auto-body shops in Willets Point. But, since the site is defined mainly by expressways and parking lots, the architects are fighting a losing battle. It's a pity that the Mets didn't build on the far West Side of Manhattan, where Colonel Ruppert first thought of putting Yankee Stadium, ninety years ago, and where the Jets recently tried to build a football stadium. A football stadium doesn't need to be in the middle of a city, but a baseball park, smaller and used much more often, does.

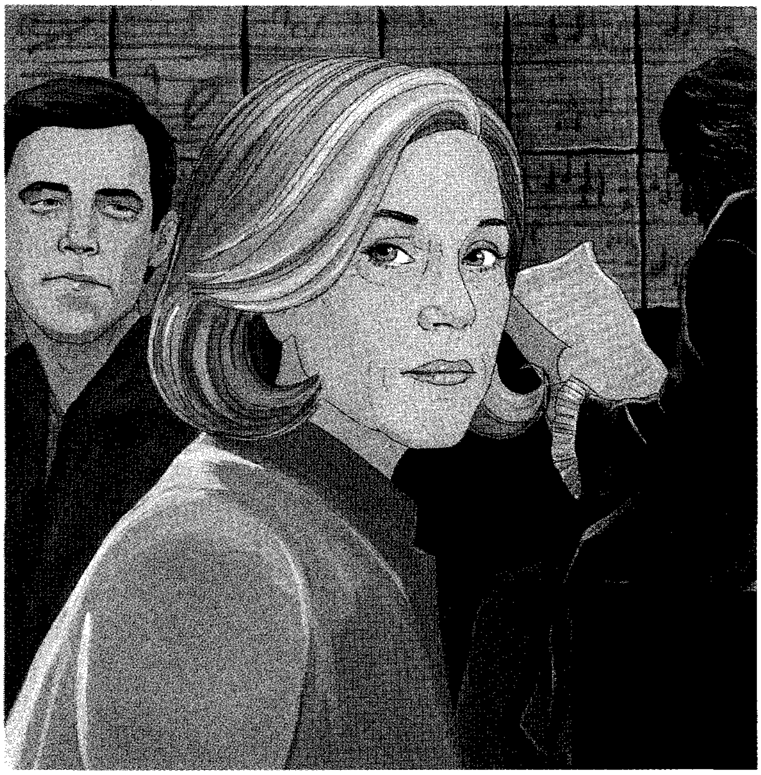
A stadium is a stage set as sure as anything on Broadway, and it determines the tone of the dramas within. Citi Field suggests a team that wants to be liked, even to the point of claiming some history that isn't its own. Yankee Stadium, however, reflects an organization that is in the business of being admired, and is built to serve as a backdrop for the image of the Yankees, at once connected to the city and rising grandly above it. ♦

THE THEATRE

TIME TRAVEL

Moisés Kaufman and Noël Coward summon up the past.

BY JOHN LAHR



Colin Hanks, Jane Fonda, and Zach Grenier in "33 Variations."

LARA TOMLIN

In 1819, Ludwig van Beethoven, along with some fifty other composers, was asked to write a variation to an undistinguished waltz composed by his publisher, Anton Diabelli. Four years and forty ducats later, he produced Opus 120, not one but thirty-three variations on the waltz, in which he revolutionized the variation form. "33 Variations" (written and directed by Moisés Kaufman, at the Eugene O'Neill) is a musicology lecture disguised as an intellectual detective story within an emotional melodrama. "I need to know what he saw in this waltz," says the play's dogged shamus, Dr. Katherine Brandt (Jane Fonda), a classical-music scholar who is in a race to finish her monograph before she succumbs to a motor-neuron disease. Did Beethoven do it for cash? For the fun of teasing the mediocrity of his publisher? For the glory of one-upping J. S. Bach and his thirty-two Goldberg Variations? Or, as seems more likely, did Beethoven hear, in the earthiness of the German dance, a chance to demonstrate through his virtuosity how the commonplace can yield both metaphysical exploration and radical transformation? Or are all these questions just palaver, drummed up so that Kaufman can provide Beethoven with a commercial Broadway show?

Kaufman's passion for the music is what drives "33 Variations," a play that is more about time and rhythm than about characterization, in which narrative motifs are orchestrated to mimic the trajectory of Beethoven's music from the apparently trivial to the transfigured. Kaufman's scenes may be clumsy, but the interplay between lights, projections, and set and the stories of Beethoven and Brandt is elegant. A concert Steinway (well played by Diane Walsh, whose CD of the Diabelli Variations was selling briskly in the lobby the night I was there) stands beside Derek McLane's beautifully designed proscenium stage, which re-creates the well-lit shelves and gray manuscript boxes of Beethoven's archive in Bonn. Kaufman's characters are stick figures, but the projections he displays of Beethoven's fierce, blunt musical notations, often gouged into the paper, impose a weightier biographical reality on the events. The hieroglyphic splatter of these markings gives the show a visceral subliminal power. At one point, the archive librarian, Gertie (Susan Kellermann), who befriends Brandt, explains how Beethoven worked. "He wrote first in pencil," she says, "and when he was sure, he went back over it with ink and highlighted the parts he liked." She pushes a button for infrared light, and a specially lit sketch appears. Gertie continues, "You see how it turns blue? The bright white is the ink. These are the parts he chose to keep in the piece." The topography of Beethoven's creative imagination—with its false starts and its discoveries—is spread out before us: a revelation, a sensation, and pure theatrical magic.

The excitement of Beethoven's visionary genius doesn't extend to Kaufman's plot, however, whose simplistic shorthand is more televisionary. Beethoven (Zach Grenier) and Brandt are both isolated by an obsession with excellence; both are physically declining; both struggle against time to finish their endeavors; both stories begin with the mundane—a waltz, a doctor's waiting room—and end with an extraordinary leap into the unknown. The play marks Fonda's return to the Broadway stage after forty-six years, but the role is no test of her emotional range. Her presence—with its curious amalgam of alertness and standoffishness—is a neat bit of typecasting; Fonda provides a sort of scaffolding of willpower and disdain that props up the ambitious Brandt. "You can't excel at anything if you keep changing careers," Brandt tells her dutiful daughter, Clara (Samantha Mathis), a professional costume designer who is flirting with stage design. "You'll always be mediocre at everything." The *froideur* between mother and daughter is indicated, stated, even resolved at the finale, but never dramatized. There is no scene in which Brandt reveals herself to her daughter or in which her daughter is appropriately revealed to her. With so much left unexplored in the text, the actors inevitably fall back on their own personalities. In the romantic subplot involving Clara and a gawky male nurse turned beau, Colin Hanks is especially successful at using his considerable charm and decency to beef up a slim role.

Soulful, nostalgic, tender, Beethoven's final variation moves from a fugue to a minuet, marked *grazioso e dolce*, a spectral ending to a journey that begins as "a beerhall waltz" and concludes as an immanence of the sacred. In a startling and strangely moving stage image, the present and the past are brought together as the actors dance until Beethoven and Brandt finally stand alone before us, "as if they were about to begin their discussions in earnest," the stage direction reads. The show is inconsequential, but the feeling into which it taps is not. Both Brandt and Beethoven have undergone a paradigm shift. As the sublime music plays them out, these poorly drawn characters nonetheless become emblems of hopefulness to an audience in the midst of its own paradigm shift, the outcome of which is far from certain.

At one point in "33 Variations," after Brandt has undergone a series of oppressive X-rays, Beethoven appears and sits behind her on a gurney; she leans back and rests her body against his. The conversation with the dead never ends. As Noël Coward's 1941 play "Blithe Spirit" (at the Shubert, under the direction of Michael Blakemore) demonstrates, however, the communication is not always so consoling. Written in seven days, in reaction to the "pitiful sight" of London's wartime devastation—it played 1,998 performances, one of the longest runs in London theatre history—Coward's brilliant ghost play explores the connections between memory, mourning, and the erotic; it's a comic demonstration in which the dead's aggression toward the living confronts the aggression of the living toward the dead.

The novelist Charles Condomine (Rupert Everett) has arranged a séance, as research for a murder mystery he's working on. In a posh drawing room that's as proper and sedate as Charles's sturdy second wife, Ruth (Jayne Atkinson), Madame Arcati (Angela Lansbury), the Martini-guzzling, Irving Berlin-loving local spiritualist, accidently conjures up his late first wife, Elvira (Christine Ebersole). Charles's second marriage is a comfortable, sensible relationship—"Not the wildest stretch of imagination could describe it as the first fine careless rapture," Ruth says. When the exciting and possessive Elvira materializes, in a sort of ghostly off-white chiffon poncho, she is a vision of long-mourned passion. She reminds Charles that he once beat her with a billiard cue. "Only very, very gently," he replies. Charles can see and talk to Elvira; Ruth can do neither. Charles sees the memory of love; Ruth sees an apparent lunatic. The unconscious, in all its wayward self-destructiveness, has been released. Fiasco naturally ensues. Elvira's malicious mischief ultimately causes Ruth's death. In due time, Charles finds himself an "astral bigamist," persecuted by the tyrannical ghosts of both wives. While they trash the drawing room, Coward, as he does in all his major comedies, lets his comic surrogate tiptoe away from the chaos. "Parting is such *sweet* sorrow," Charles says, in the play's last line, exiting as bookshelves and paintings tumble. The moment plays as both a raspberry to melancholy and a huzzah for denial.

At the bar at the Shubert, you can buy a "Madame Arcati's Ectoplasm Martini." May I lift a virtual glass of this potent stuff to Blakemore, one of the finest directors of farce around, and to his superb ensemble. A particular tip of the cloth cap to Everett, who in tuxedo and pompadour cuts a fine Coward figure, hitting every upper-middle-class note of the Master's teasing nonchalance with swaggering languor. Atkinson's fluting high dudgeon and Ebersole's flirtatious hostility create a terrific force field for Everett's droll reactions. At the center of the mayhem, of course, is the eighty-three-year-old Lansbury. The epitome of the swiftness that Coward admired in his players, she scuttles expertly around the stage like a water bug—not a poltergeist but a whirlwind of idiosyncratic expertise. Together, the actors offer a master class in light comedy. ♦

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Video: John Lahr and Michael Blakemore.

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DANCING

LIFELIKE

Puppets in New York.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

Japanese puppetry takes its great power from the fact that it is very realistic and very artificial at the same time. As was proved again by the Awaji Puppet Theatre Company's recent season at Japan Society—its first New York appearance in eleven years—what strikes you first is the realism. The puppeteers seem to have spent five centuries (that is the genre's estimated age, at minimum) working out the precise rhythm with which a weeping woman would dab her eyes with her sleeve, or the exact wobble with which a drunken god would raise to his mouth his fourth, as opposed to his third, cup of sake. Donald Keene, in his 1965 book "Bunraku" (the Bunraku tradition grew from the same root as the Awaji), wrote that when people want to compliment a puppet they usually say, "It seems to be alive!," and the lifelikeness is indeed a thrill. But the reason that we can enjoy the realism is that in other respects, most respects, these figures are not at all like us. The Awaji puppets are about three feet tall, to start with. Furthermore, to get around, they need three men, with rods and springs, manipulating them. The puppeteers are clothed and masked in black, but that doesn't mean that we don't see them.

All this, maybe, we could shut out, and enter fully into the illusion, but there is another thing stopping us: the fixity of the puppets' faces. Awaji dramas, like their Bunraku (and also Kabuki) counterparts, often concern the furthest outdistricts of human emotion. In one of the offerings at Japan Society, the ferry-crossing scene from "Hidakagawa Iriai Zakura" (1759), a woman becomes so jealous of her beloved's mistress that she turns into a green sea monster. In another scene, from "The Miracle at Tsubosaka Temple" (1887), a blind man is so stricken with remorse for having doubted his wife's chastity that he hurls himself over a cliff; then the wife arrives, figures out what happened, and jumps over the cliff after him. These violent deeds are preceded by long, histrionic speeches, but, as the characters deliver their orations, their faces, eerily, do not move. (Some of the puppets can move their eyes, eyebrows, and/or mouths, but only in small ways.) The emotion is displaced from the face and thereby gains in subtlety and force.

Much of it is transferred to the torso and the hands and, above all, the head. How, in the scene with the drunken god—it is Ebisu, the god of wealth—the host manages to indicate his sense of the inadvisability of Ebisu's having another sake, and how, when the sake bucket is finally empty, Ebisu, staring into it, communicates his sorrow, is a great mystery. It is also an indication of why puppeteers have to begin their training in childhood. But, as I recall, it all had to do with tilts of the chin—the angle of the head in relation to the chest. The heads of the Awaji puppets move constantly, and not just to signal nameable emotions but to tell us, in a general way, that these creatures are alive. In a sense, the head is doing the breathing for the body.

As for the characters' words, those, too, are displaced—to a chanter. This person, considered the star of the puppetry team, sits to the side of the stage, where he tells the story and, when necessary, speaks the dialogue. The characters' lines are not always interesting. (In "The Miracle at Tsubosaka Temple," the cliff-jumping couple is restored to life, and the husband is given back his sight. He greets his wife as follows: "You are my wife? What a surprise! It's very nice to meet you. Oh, I am so happy.") But, as with many equally unstirring scripts in Western opera, the crux is not the words but the singing. The chanter sobs; he gasps; he calls on Heaven to witness his grief. (And he does so in male and female, old and young, high-status and low-status voices.) When the woman in the ferry-crossing scene from "Hidakagawa" describes her jealousy, the chanter runs the gamut of vocal expressiveness: head notes and belly notes, squeals and grunts, trills and runs without end. Meanwhile, the lady for whom he is speaking stands there with an unmoving face, white and lustrous, like a pearl. We seem, here, to get everything that art can give: the abstemious and the unleashed, the Gothic and the Baroque. The logic is not logical; it is lyrical, musical.

To see puppetry in New York, you don't have to wait for the Awaji troupe to return. "Avenue Q," a sort of hipster offshoot of "The Muppet Show," has been playing on Broadway for almost six years. In this musical, two hand puppets have sex on the stage—quite a trick, in view of the fact that their bodies end at the waist. Julie Taymor, who made a long study of Asian puppetry in her youth, almost always has something going on in town: right now, the long-running "Lion King" and, until recently, the production of "The Magic Flute" that she made for the Met in 2004. (She will direct the "Spider-Man" musical that is due on Broadway next year.) Basil Twist, this city's foremost "art" puppeteer, has been steadily producing shows—"Petrushka," in 2001; "Dogugaeshi," inspired by Awaji, in 2004; "La Bella Dormente nel Bosco" ("The Sleeping Beauty"), in 2005; "Arias with a Twist," in 2008—and he will stage a "Nutcracker" with the Los Angeles Philharmonic next year. In a recent interview, I asked Twist whether he thought that puppetry today was part of avant-garde theatre. He said no: "If we have anything in common with the avant-garde, it's just that we're both marginalized." But this may have been unpretentiousness speaking. Since the nineteenth century, puppetry has turned up again and again as part of the artistic vanguard's struggle with realism, its mixed feelings about copying life. The fact that puppets are like human beings but narrower, clearer, and more poetic makes them a natural for symbolic drama. In the nineteen-sixties and seventies, in the hands of the Bread &

Puppet Theatre and Paul Zaloom, they were an important part of experimental theatre.

They are still doing service in that department. In January and February, Dan Hurlin put on a wonderfully spooky puppet show, "Disfarmer," at St. Ann's Warehouse. Mike Disfarmer (he invented the last name) was a photographer who worked in a small town in Arkansas in the early twentieth century. He was also a delusional paranoid, convinced, for example, that he was not born to the people who raised him but had been deposited on their doorstep by a tornado. Though Disfarmer was able to live on his own, and to produce beautiful photographs, the coexistence of his artistry and his mental peculiarity is an enigma, and one that, if the story had been staged with human actors, might easily have fallen prey to mad-genius sentimentality. But the sight of a miniaturized version of the man's life (a tiny camera for him to do his work; a tiny shovel for him to bury a baby doll that, appallingly, is part of his personal creation myth; tiny piles of old newspapers that gather in his rooms as, at the end of his life, his housekeeping deteriorates)—this stratagem, by its coldness and wit, paradoxically delivers the pathos of Disfarmer's story, without draining away its weirdness. It is a brilliant stroke.

Soon after "Disfarmer" closed, "Diva," the work of Sofie Krog, from Denmark, opened at HERE Arts Center, which has a puppetry series curated by Basil Twist. This piece took place inside a structure that looked like a giant, velvet-draped refrigerator and which contained, as it revolved, five small separate theatres, each with its own cast of puppets operated by Krog, who stood unseen in the center. It is impossible, in a short space, to say what happened in "Diva," but, briefly, a Professor who no longer has a body, only a head—presumably a *déformation professionnelle*—is trying, with the help of a rabbit named Eddie, to get the rest of himself back. He fails, but the Diva, our heroine, who also starts out as a disembodied head, is eventually granted a full form. Another puppet, the Butler, who is just a hand, hangs himself, and others, too, fare badly. But Eddie, our favorite, ends up on a desert island with a girl rabbit, under a blue sky hung with little white clouds, on strings. Sound too sweet? It wasn't. The death of the Butler was rather grim—and also black-humorous. (The hand hangs itself by its index finger.) But the major effect of the show was to demonstrate the sheer range of puppetry, the number of its choices—for example, its ability to play with scale. (Eddie was perhaps six inches high. The Diva, at the end, was life-size.) There is also the genre's natural reflexiveness. The bodiless heads, the despondent hand—these are puppetry jokes. Finally, Krog's show was an example of the vivacity of puppetry, its carnivalesque quality, its ability to make things fly and explode and the like. I don't want to stress that too much, because a big part of the job in writing about puppetry is to convince people that it's serious. It is serious. Its mediation between realism and fantasy makes it so, even apart from the efforts of its best practitioners. At the same time, however, it's a lot of fun. ♦

Members of the Awaji Puppet Theatre Company prepare for a performance at Japan Society. Photograph by Sylvia Plachy.

THE CURRENT CINEMA

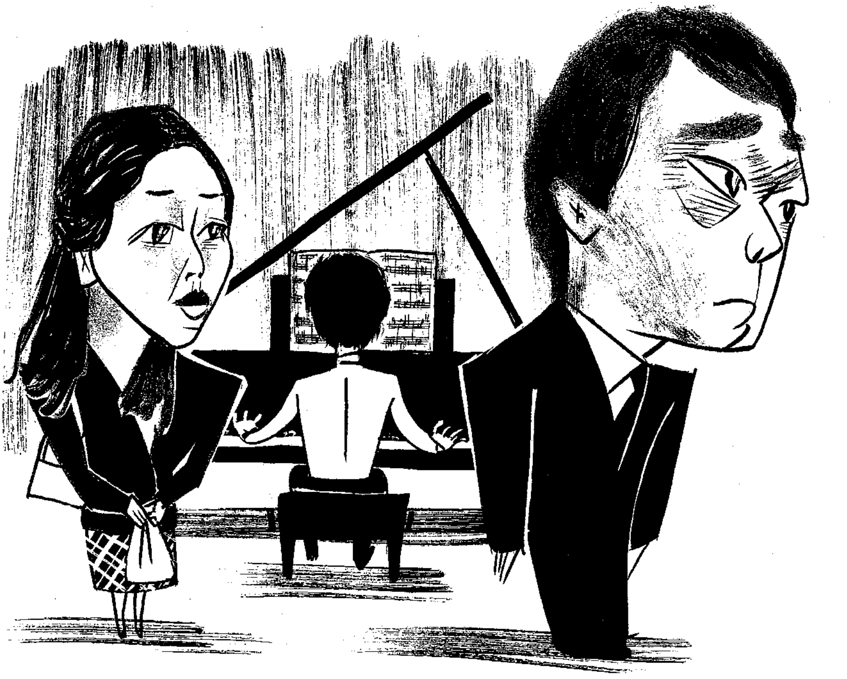
NEED A JOB?

"Tokyo Sonata" and "The Great Buck Howard."

BY ANTHONY LANE

There is no saying what manner of movies will be bred by the economic slump. If "Tokyo Sonata," directed by Kiyoshi Kurosawa, is anything to go by, we could be in for some unnatural spawnings, for this is a most peculiar hybrid. Our hero is Ryuhei Sasaki (Teruyuki Kagawa), although any heroic status is swiftly peeled off him, layer by layer. He is the director of administration at a health-care-equipment company, a post which we see him lose almost at once. What stays with you from that early scene, though, is not just Sasaki's passivity as his fate is decreed but the physical backdrop—the blinds of his office bright with sunshine yet quaking with the gusts of a coming storm. You don't sense a metaphor being labored here so much as an awkward, not quite comic misfit between human toilers and their environment. We see it again in the steep street up which Sasaki tramps home at the end of the day; at the junction where he meets his son Kenji (Kai Inowaki), returning from grade school; and in the train that rattles past the family dining area as they eat. Nothing, on the evidence so far, seems to sit happily in this world. The whole saga has the air of a desperate striving for peace.

The image of that dinner, framed from the side, cannot help but summon the ghost of Yasujiro Ozu, the serenest of Japanese filmmakers, many of whose dramas were played out—and sometimes climactically resolved—amid the quietude of domestic gatherings. Some of the tense conservatism that he noted in Japanese society lingers in "Tokyo Sonata," and I will not quickly forget the sight of Sasaki opening a beer at the table, drinking deep, giving a little groan of satisfaction, and finally announcing, "Let's eat." Then, and only then, is everybody else free to dig in to their food; it's as though the oafish quaffing of the patriarch were a way of saying grace. The flip side of that authority, of course, is that he cannot cope with its loss—cannot, for instance, bring himself to tell his wife, Megumi (Kyoko Koizumi), that he has been made redundant. This is less a matter of shame than of mental block; we feel that Sasaki cannot bear to tell *himself*, either, and so it is that he sets off in the morning, wearing a suit and carrying a briefcase, and joins the growing limbo of the jobless.



Kyoko Koizumi, Kai Inowaki, and Teruyuki Kagawa in Kiyoshi Kurosawa's film.

TOM BACHTELL

After lining up for a free handout of rice porridge from a food cart, he spies an old classmate, who, though in a hurry and apparently yelling at a colleague on a cell phone, joins him for a bowl of the same slop. With a kind of gentle slyness, Sasaki inquires, "Are you by any chance unemployed?" He knows the signs already. The friend is indeed out of work; that cell phone is programmed to ring five times an hour, with nobody on the other end. These two join the ranks of other modern men in deep denial: Tom Wilkinson in "The Full Monty" (1997), and the French executives in "Time Out" (2001) and "The Adversary" (2002), all of whom, while keeping up active fronts, sought to fill their vacant days. The last of these sprang from the true story of Jean-Claude Romand, who for years worked at the World Health Organization, or so his family believed; in the end, the lie overwhelmed him, and in 1993 he killed them all, including his parents, rather than unveil the truth—namely, that he had no connection with the W.H.O., and that much of his time was spent in a car park or in the woods.

The lesson of these stories, taken together, is that the pressure of unemployment can erupt in countless forms—in mayhem, anomie, or wistful farce. Kurosawa may be the first person to try to cram them all into a single picture. His story starts off in sullen decorum before veering off in directions that would have caused Ozu to turn pale and drop his tea set. Kenji begins piano lessons, although his increasingly furious father has forbidden them; the boy turns out to be not just a prodigy but a sounding board for his beautiful music teacher (Haruka Igawa), who talks to him about her divorce. Meanwhile, Kenji's elder brother, Takashi (Yu Koyanagi), cuts his hair and joins the United States military—one of a hundred and thirty-eight Japanese recruits, we are informed in TV news reports. (This is pure invention; no such troops exist.) He is sent to Iraq, from where he writes to his mother and reveals, if I understand correctly, that he is changing sides. Sasaki himself accepts a cleaning job in a mall; finding a wad of cash beside a toilet, he flees the scene and runs head-on into trouble. As for Megumi, she is kidnapped from the house at knifepoint: "I can't go home," she tells her wild-eyed abductor, before driving him to the seashore. Nightfall finds her lying in the surf.

Each of these plot developments is, to say the least, on the nutty side. En masse, they strike me as a deliberate rebuke: to the patient realism that prevailed in the first half of the movie, and perhaps to a penchant for resignation—for refusing to make waves—which Kurosawa perceives in the wider response to misfortune. An abrupt switch of mood, however, is never easy to bring off, and it tends to work best when the director unearths hidden connections—as Jonathan Demme did with "Something Wild," for example, the sadism of his second act answering to something heady and manic in the screwball comedy of the first. Kurosawa, by contrast, is more of a lunger, and "Tokyo Sonata" could be called "Anything Wild" in its quest for late-blooming chaos. When the movie screened at Cannes last year, "people found it hilarious in places that were wildly inappropriate," the director has said. To be fair, I have heard the same thing happen at the films of his namesake Akira—no relation, incidentally, though the echo can't hurt. If you were called Randy von Stroheim or Kevin Buñuel, wouldn't *you* go into pictures?

For all its oddities, this movie does carry weight, and, with more than eight per cent of Americans out of work, the timing of its release here could not be more acute. Kurosawa arranges his characters carefully in the cityscape and then comes to realize that they won't stay still, not with the climate—in skies and markets alike—as volatile as it is. The story looks to people in command and watches them melt: "You say you're protecting us, Dad. But what do you do every day?" Takashi asks. Meanwhile, at school, Kenji undoes his teacher with a stray remark. The classroom slides into anarchy, and the teacher tells him, "You can ignore me and I'll ignore you, too"—the movie's most frightening line, if you follow its implications into the culture at large. There is a miraculous sequence in "Tokyo Sonata" in which Kenji performs "Clair de Lune" to a roomful of stunned listeners, who gather and gaze like thirsty travellers at a spring. But miracles pass, as Kurosawa knows, and nothing, not even Debussy, can quench a life that is drained of respect, and parched for want of work.

To cast John Malkovich as a mentalist makes perfect sense. If there is any actor who looks as if he could read our minds, and maybe sneak into their crannies to wreak a little mischief, it is Malkovich. No wonder the writer-director Sean McGinly got him to play the title role in "The Great Buck Howard." (According to the end credits, Buck is based on the Amazing Kreskin, who in real life has spent decades inside the thoughts of paying audiences.) When we first encounter Buck, he is on the slide, forever mentioning that he was on the "Tonight Show" with Johnny Carson sixty-one times, though not in Johnny's last ten years. Now he plays the smaller venues, like Bakersfield, California, or Akron, Ohio, and he needs a new assistant.

Enter Troy (Colin Hanks), a stolid law-school dropout in search of experience. What he gets is errands: ferry Buck around, cope with his tantrums (which are hardly seismic), and wonder how he pulls off his tricks—or "effects," as the maestro calls them. This is promising ground; it isn't hard to imagine Malkovich injecting a dose of threat into his act, and life on the provincial circuit, as we know from "The Fabulous Baker Boys," has a humbling, whiskeyish pathos of its own. In the event, "The Great Buck Howard" goes soft on us. We get a single sight gag, about Buck's pump-action handshake, rehashed ad infinitum; we get a misguided score, by Blake Neely, which turns jaunty and ruins the genuinely creepy sight of Buck mesmerizing three hundred people in Cincinnati into lying down at his feet; and we get a futile voice-over from Troy, who spells out details that we can see quite well for ourselves, then comes on all Capra-like, hailing his employer for "showing people that the impossible was possible, that there *was* magic in this world." Not here, there wasn't. The cast is speckled with lively souls like Steve Zahn and Griffin Dunne (and Colin Hanks's father, Tom, one of the producers), but the only person who wakes the movie from its slumbers is Emily Blunt. She gets a nothing role as a publicist, and makes something both sultry and casual out of it, bedding the unworthy Troy with no more fuss than someone ordering a plate of ribs. He says that he wants life to make his heart race. "That really turns me on," she tells him, "that whole existentialist thing." Right sentiment. Wrong guy. ♦

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The Front Row, a blog about movies.

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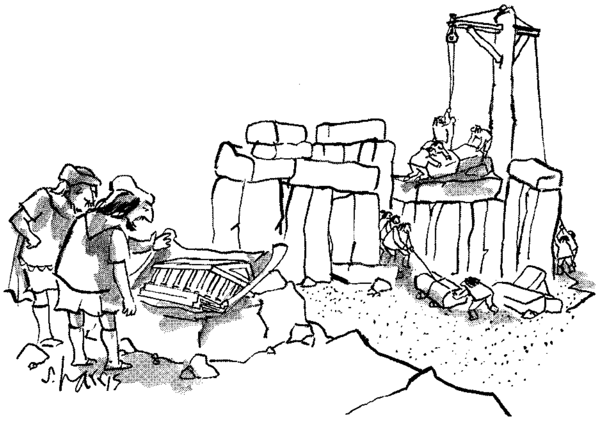
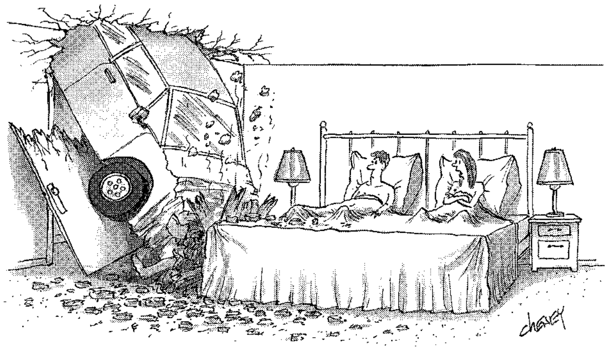


"Tell me you kept the box and receipt."
Jae Choe, New York City



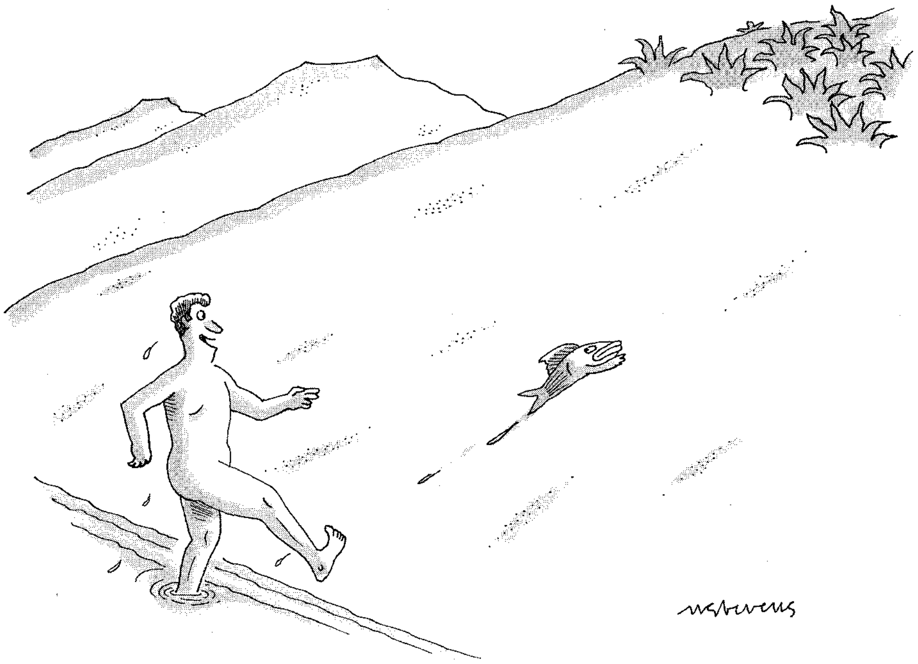
THE FINALISTS

"Well, at least he made curfew."
Andrea Fidurko, Needham, Mass.

"I thought our sex life was a train wreck."
Stevan Savich, Crown Point, Ind.

"We should tell the G.P.S. people that they changed the off-ramp."
Georgia Gebhardt, Wilmette, Ill.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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